Ars Paradoxica

Season One

01: Hypothesis (remastered)

WRITTEN BY DANIEL MANNING & MISCHA STANTON
DIRECTED & SOUND DESIGN BY MISCHA STANTON

[[SFX: tape recorder starts]]

SALLY GRISSOM (SG): Hello? Testing, one two… Okay! This is the audio diary of Sally Grissom. The date today is… Oh, hell, does it even matter? It's October 29th. 1943, I guess? For me, that's the day after August 14th, 20[redacted]. So… whatever that means.

This recorder is [*laugh*] enormous! When they were getting my room here set up for me, they asked if I wanted a *journal*– "for my thoughts." I don't much like written journals, so I told them I wanted to record my voice instead. I much prefer hearing my thoughts out loud. I guess I was imagining some kind of handheld deal? Like, not like this *monstrosity* on my desk! But I'm glad they brought it. I need to keep a record of my thoughts here. [*trailing off*] They are... more jumbled than they've ever been.

Let me start from the beginning: I was in my lab at the SSC. I'm a resident physicist there, the face in front of a small team of other researchers. We were building an array of these generators that cancel out the Higgs mechanism. I mean, this thing was our *baby*. We had poured *countless* hours, *sleepless* nights, and about, ha, like nine figures into this thing. After a solid *year* of work, we were finally ready to test it. So there I am on the day of, and my hands are *shaking* with anticipation as I placed a kilogram of platinum (our test mass) on a pedestal in the center of the array.

[[SFX: machine spools up]]

As it spooled up, the vibration knocked the cylinder onto the floor so I left the observation room to go put it back on its pedestal. I remember one of my assistants asking if I wanted them to stop the test. But I told them not to waste time. [*sarcastically*] I actually said, "It won't do any harm!" [*laugh*] Won't do any harm…

The generators hit critical energy faster than they should have. I heard this loud hum, and a crackle of electricity, and I remember this smell, like *ozone*, and—and the taste of iron in the back of my throat. I *tried* to look out to my assistants, but the world had gone... blurry. A bright light *crashed* across the room. For just a second, everything went black, and white, and red…

[[SFX: machine grows in intensity]]

Then the light got brighter, hotter, whiter and whiter, it filled my whole vision…

[[SFX: time machine activates]]

The next thing I knew, I was lying on the deck of a huge boat?

[[SFX: ocean waves]]

My head was full of white noise, I was dizzy, and shivering cold. Uh, the contents of my breakfast were spread out in front of me. [*laugh*] It wasn't my best moment. I must have stayed a good five, six minutes half-conscious on the cold metal floor before anyone found me. I remember… a pair of hands checking my pulse, making sure I was breathing. That first pair of hands called for a second, and before long I had a whole… uh, What do you call a bunch of Navy guys? A squad, uh? A *sloop*? A swearing—yeah that's it. A swearing of sailors surrounded me, and they spoke to each other in hushed tones. One of them came and ordered the rest to [*deep, official sounding*] "Take me to the brig!" At least, I think that's what he said? Something like that. I don't remember the exact words, I was pretty out of it! But that was *definitely* his tone.

The first sailor, the one who checked to see if I was alive, he refused. Said I should be taken to the sick bay. [*sigh*] One of them asked if I could walk. "*Walk*?" I meant to say. "I can barely *stand*! Like, who are you people, anyway? I demand to talk to someone in charge!" Well, I meant to say all that. As I was, I sort of wobbled on my feet, mumbled a bit, aaaand puked. All over the nearest sailor. A few of them scooped me up and carried me down to the lower depths of the ship.

So, sidetrack: when I was young, my parents took me to see the USS Intrepid in New York City. It's a docked aircraft carrier from World War II that had been retired and then renovated into like a sea, air and space museum. The Lunar Lander was there, and my parents had wanted me to see the capsule my grandfather had landed on the moon in.

[[SFX: Sally's voice briefly becomes degraded, as though the radio signal is bad or corrupted; then returns to normal]]

But, back to *this* ship: once my vision cleared a bit and I could finally see where I was, I remembered thinking that this ship looked almost *exactly* like the Intrepid, except that here, the controls weren't sealed behind plexiglas. I was in a holding cell. I mean? It was just a cage, really? Like a closet, with bars, stuffed in the corner of one room, no more than, maybe five feet across?

I lay there for a while, moving as little as possible, holding my *throbbing* head, trying to stop the room from spinning... [*softly*] Maybe even trying to wake myself up from this terrible dream. Finally, [*sigh*] after what seemed like an hour, but was probably more like fifteen minutes? I heard a voice from inside the room. Evidently, one of the sailors had stayed behind. That first one, the one that cared whether or not I was still alive. He was quiet, and calm, like the sea after a storm. He said to me…

[[SFX: radio tuning; depths of the ship]]

CHET WHICKMAN (CW): Ma'am? Excuse me, ma'am? Can you hear me?

SG: I uh…

[[SFX: Sally vomits twice]]

CW: [*gently*] Take it easy, just take it easy. Don't worry ma'am, you'll be alright. The Director's on his way out here now, and he's gonna wanna talk to you.

[[SFX: Sally vomits again]]

CW: Rest up, save your strength.

SG: [*dazed*] Wh--Where…. Where am I?

CW: You're in Philadelphia, ma'am. Or, I suppose, just *off* the coast of Philadelphia.

SG: On-on a… ship?

CW: Yes ma'am. You're aboard a cannon-class destroyer escort. Most days we're running men and materials to the Allied fronts. Today we're… Well, we're doing something different.

SG: Diff...rent?

CW: Well ma'am, I can't tell you much, it's all classified, *way* above my pay grade, but I guess you must know. Some army scientists have taken over operations this week. Run over the ship like ants on a picnic.

SG: Must… know?

CW: Well, sure. [*beat*] Isn't that what you're *doing* here?

SG: Not… um… I'm not sure what I'm doing here.

CW: Well, you went through an awful lot of trouble getting past our security. How'd you manage that by the way?

SG: [*insistent*] No. No! I was… I was in my lab! My machine… There was a bright light, and I–

CW: You should save your story for when the Director gets here.

SG: [*growing in concern*] It's not a story! It's true! I'm a scientist, a *physicist*, I was *working* in my lab, and this generator, it must have–

[[SFX: Sally falls, hits the bars, and groans]]

CW: Shhh, calm down, save your strength. Here, drink some water.

SG: Thank you.

CW: What's your name?

SG: Sally.

CW: Petty Officer Chet Whickman. Nice to meet you.

[[SFX: Sally drinks]]

CW: Now listen, ma'am, uh–

SG: Doctor.

CW: Sure, okay, Doc. Listen, whatever your story is, I believe you. I saw what happened, I was there on the deck when we turned our machine on. There was a big flash of white, our thing did its thing, and then the light faded and… you were lying on the deck. I saw you appear outta nowhere. [*modestly*] I don't know enough about it to know what they were doing, I just sail the ship, but I know it's something weird. For all I know you're some ordinary lady minding your own—hell, maybe you're working for us on some other government science project.

SG: I'm not with the Army, I told you–

CW: But it doesn't matter. Because the Director, he's got to *act* as if you're a spy that snuck onboard to steal his project. You dropped yourself into a whole mess of top-secret, ma'am, and… you're not leaving the Eldridge until he talks to you and finds out *everything* you know. So take it easy. I'm real sorry, but… I've got a feeling you're in for a long day.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

SG: They kept me in that cell for *five hours*. I couldn't stretch my arms, and my head was still spinning and *pounding* from the inbound trip. I asked for a dramamine, and all I got was like, a confused look from Whickman. Apparently, they don't have that here.

So, they carried me up to the interrogation room, and just about the time that my head stopped spinning, in walked… the Director. Imagine a cigar-chomping army general, and then you... [*sigh*] No, just imagine a cigar-chomping army general. That's the Director. Big frame, square jaw, hair slicked back to an inch of its life. Under his practiced smile, he was a *shark*. Cunning, focused, and… lethal.

[[SFX: radio tuning; door opens, closes; footsteps; a long chair scrape; shuffling papers]]

BILL DONOVAN (BD): [*polished and condescending*] What's your name, little girl?

SG: Fuck you. That's my name.

BD: [*laugh*] See? And here I was, perfectly ready to assume your cooperation. I was gonna sit here, smile politely, ask a few questions, and we'd be done. You'd be off on your merry way. But you've decided to be hostile. So now I have to *treat* you like a hostile captive. And hostile captives don't get treated well on my ship. [*dramatically*] They get strung up, like a carcass in a butcher's shop. They get questioned at the end of a hot poker. And they leave *screaming* in agony, or quietly sobbing, broken and torn. Now, does that sound like very much fun to you? No. Me neither. So, should we try again? What's your name?

SG: Sally.

BD: Nice to meet you, Sally. My name's William Donovan. Friends call me Bill.

SG: Nice ship you got here, Bill.

BD: See? Friends already. Thank you. It's a modest little escort, but it was on-hand to do the work we needed. Where are you from, Sally?

SG: The US.

BD: Can you be a little more specific, honey?

SG: No.

BD: Now I've told you what happens if you don't cooperate–

SG: –*Not* if you're going to keep calling me "honey" and "little girl." It's Dr. Grissom. And I'm not just gonna sit here and be talked down to just because I'm a woman and you've got me locked up.

BD: I—I'm sorry, Doctor. You're absolutely right. Now please, can you tell me where you're from?

SG: I'm from all over the country. Grew up on a farm in Iowa, went to school in the Northeast. I've been working in Texas for the past few years.

BD: Where in Texas?

SG: Waxahachie.

BD: Wock-a-what? [*laughing*]

SG: Wa-xa-ha-chie. Near Dallas.

BD: And what do you do out there in [*carefully*] Waxahachie, TX?

SG: I'm a physicist. I'm working on the SSC.

BD: What's that?

SG: The… The Superconducting Super Collider? The big particle accelerator? Biggest in the world, right near Dallas? Isn't this a military science division?

BD: [*concerned*] Who told you that?

SG: That sailor. The one that brought me up here. Whickman.

BD: Good kid. Smart. Sure does *talk* a lot though. [*beat*] Where'd you go to school, Dr. Grissom?

SG: MIT.

BD: [*disbelievingly*] MIT, as in the Massachusetts Institute of Technology?

SG: I'm not sure how many *other* MITs there are, but yeah, MIT. Why?

BD: I'm just impressed. I've never met a woman with a doctorate from MIT before. Very impressive.

SG: Um… Thank you?

BD: So, Doctor. In your expert opinion, how do you think you ended up on my ship?

SG: I'm not sure. I was working with a machine in my lab. It was supposed to negate the Higgs field localized to a specific–

BD: In English please, Doctor.

SG: [*sound of protest*]

BD: Not all of us have degrees from MIT.

SG: It cancelled out one of the fundamental forces of the universe. And I kind of… got in the middle of it. So I get why *something* happened to me, but why I ended up on *your* ship? I don't know. Can you tell me any more about what you guys are working on here? Maybe something between the two...?

BD: Nice try.

SG: Bill, I–

BD: [*sternly*] Listen, Dr. Sally Grissom from Iowa, or whoever you are, I'm done playing games here. Who are you working for?

SG: I told you, I work for the SSC!

BD: The SS… C. I see. And how much would they have paid you if you had brought our plans back to Germany?

SG: Germany? What are you talking about?

BD: Doctor, I know for a fact that what we're doing here is on the bleeding edge of scientific discovery. The stuff we're doing here, it sounds like something straight out of *Astonishing Tales*. It's amazing, it's powerful… It's dangerous. And I will see myself burning in *hell* before I let Adolf and his Kraut goons get his hands on this technology!

SG: [*laugh*] Adolf? Krauts? What is this, World War Two?

BD: It sure ain't the Revolution, sweetheart. And we have come a *long* way since then. Plenty of new ways to keep someone locked up. To keep them in *agony*. Until we learn every Nazi secret that you've got in that pretty little head.

SG: [*quickly*] What's the date?

BD: What?

SG: [*desperately*] The date. The date today, please. Before you lock me up and throw away the key, torture me until I'm a bloody goddamn stump rotting away in a cage for the rest of my days, just tell me... What is today's date?

BD: An odd last request.

SG: Please…. Bill. Please.

BD: It's October 28th. 1943.

SG: ...Oh no.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

SG: Officially, it's known as "Project Rainbow" but I've only ever heard it called "The Philadelphia Experiment." An urban legend, or so I thought. As the story goes, the military was testing some kind of cloaking device to shield ships from enemy radar. It went back to some of Einstein's theories. But when they turned it on, there was a bright flash, and... Something went wrong. Some people say the ship disappeared, or teleported. Some people say it really did become truly invisible. Late-night AM radio conspiracy fodder, am I right? But the USS Eldridge really did test out a device that could bend light. But it did soooomething else, and instead of cloaking the ship... Here I am! What I'm guessing is that their weird science plus my weird science equals time… travel? I don't know. I'm still working it out.

Once I had the Director convinced that I wasn't a *spy*, they took me back to shore and put me on the next flight out west. When I stepped off the plane, I was slapped in the face with this *wall* of hot air. The sun beat down on me from a cloudless blue sky, and the reflection off the desert was *blinding*.

They pushed me into a Jeep and we drove for a... few more hours? As much as I would ask, I couldn't get a word out of the Director or the driver in that *whole* time. We just *drove*. In *silence*. For *hours*. We drove for miles and miles, further into the flat desert, away from civilization. Finally, about ten minutes before we arrived...

[[SFX: radio tuning; Sally snoring; car rumbling]]

BD: Here, read this.

SG: OHSHI– you scared the *hell* out of me!

BD: Fall asleep?

SG: ...Yeah.

BD: Not much to the scenery, I know. Flat for miles, makes you sleepy. No shame. Not long now. Here, read this.

SG: What is it?

[[SFX: folder flipping pages]]

BD: It's a highly-classified military profile on your new home.

SG: My new… what do you mean?

BD: We are rapidly approaching the town of Polvo, New Mexico. Population about ▉▉ hundred, ▉▉ square miles. It's not a town you'll find on any map. That's because the US government built it two years ago. Now the purpose of this little town is to provide a think-tank for clever scientists. All run by the Office of Developed Anomalous Resources: ODAR. Here, removed from the rest of the American people, they can be free to think up new ideas for the war effort. Ideas like the machine we were testing today.

SG: So you want me to join your scientist think-tank?

BD: Well, it's not that simple. You--you see, this town, the work that's done here, the people that live here, even the babies that are born here… It's all classified on a level so deep, barely a handful of men in the entire country know it even exists.

SG: And that includes me.

BD: Bingo.

SG: So I'm a hostage.

BD: A house to yourself, three squares a day. A town full of people *just* as smart as you are, and all the new gadgets the US Army can buy. If that's a prison, sign me up.

SG: But I can't refuse.

BD: No. You can't.

SG: And how long will I be kept there?

BD: Win the war for us, and then we'll talk.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

SG: And that was it. I'm going to be working for them. They've got a whole town, out in the middle of the desert. It seems kinda like what I've read about Los Alamos, and the Manhattan Project, where they built the first nuclear weapons. Donovan *says* he's gonna give me free reign, I mean, who knows. He said he'd even get me some staff, when he can pull them away from other projects, and I won't lie, *that* makes me nervous. I've seen the movies about going into the past, changing little things. I don't wanna pull anyone away from anything that was going to have an impact on *my* history.

[[SFX: radio tuning; Esther and Jack are individually addressing an interviewer we never hear]]

ESTHER ROBERTS (ER): My name is Esther Roberts, I work in the Predictive Mechanics division under Anthony Partridge.

JACK WYATT (JW): Jack Wyatt, I'm a mechanical engineer.

ER: Ever since I could read and write I worked for the family business on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. I had a knack for numbers. But left New York for college, and never looked back. [*laugh*] I graduated summa cum laude at the University of Chicago, and then I started my graduate studies at…

JW: What can I say? Grew up in New Jersey, got my undergraduate degree at Cornell, got my Masters in Mechanical Engineering from MIT, and that's where Dr. Partridge recruited me. I've been with ODAR ever since.

ER: I--I'm just not sure why *I'm* being brought onto this team? I'm just a lowly calculator. You could've gotten engineers worth *twice* my weight.

JW: Look, if I'm going to do this thing, I need Esther Roberts there, end of story.

ER: I was top of my class, I suppose, but isn't everyone here? Weren't you?

JW: Esther's the smartest woman I've ever met. Smarter than just about any man, too. And she's *languishing* in Predictive Mechanics' basement. She's got the skills. Listen, if this does what I think it does? Then you are dealing with a whole new type of physics that nobody's ever seen before! You want me to build a, uh, whatever this is? No problem. But you *need* Esther there to do the math. *I* need her.

ER: Jack Wyatt? Of course I know him. Worked together on just about everything in grad school. We joined up here at the same time. Haven't seen him much, since. He's some hotshot now, right?

JW: I am *not* doing this without her. But trust me, I am doing you a favor.

ER: [*laugh*] Yeah, I'm in! Can you get me a lab *with* windows this time?

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

ANTHONY PARTRIDGE (AP): It's good to see you again, Director Donovan. I didn't know you were back in town. How did the Rainbow test turn out?

BD: I'm sorry if I'm curt, but I'm a bit busy today.

AP: Uh… alright. What can I do for you, sir?

BD: You're doing some really good work here, but–

AP: [*hurriedly*] Thank you, we're getting more precise every day.

BD: And I don't want to get in the way of your progress–

AP: Well, that's why you brought us all on, because we're the *best* at what we do!

BD: Exactly, but–

AP: [*rambling*] And I really appreciate the freedoms you've given us here.

BD: [*sigh*]

AP: I know some things need to stay classified and compartmentalized, but I appreciate the chance to collaborate with experts in fields I only barely understand, practically the whole town has a hand in the project–

BD: Anthony. Can I finish?

AP: Yes, sir. I'm sorry, it's just… I know I'm not going to like what you have to tell me. You wouldn't have brought me in like this if it wasn't bad news.

BD: We're cutting funding to the Predictive Algorithms project.

AP: [*sigh*] By how much?

BD: It's being re-classified as a Tier 3 project.

AP: [*outraged*] Tier 3?! Director Donovan, sir, I know we're taking a bit longer than our original estimates, but… We're a Tier 1 project. Hell, we are *the* Tier 1 Project! This is the cornerstone of ODAR operations!

BD: I'm sorry. We're handing off the top tier to something new.

AP: Something new–something new since last week?

BD: I'm afraid so. I'll need a list of non-essential personnel on my desk by Wednesday.

AP: Non-essential? You're not just cutting our funding, you're firing people too.

BD: Actually, *you're* firing them.

AP: [*gravely*] You can't do that. These people signed a contract with the United States government that they'd be employed here until the end of the war. We've been working on this for an entire year!

BD: The terms of the agreement have changed. Contracts can be terminated. Think of it as sending troops home early.

AP: They'll have to move. Again. Find new jobs. What are they supposed to put on their resumé? Worked 1941-1943 at the Organization Too Secret to Know, don't tell anybody?

BD: We'll make sure they can get any job they might want. Honestly, Anthony, they probably don't even need our help. Your boys are the best of the best. And they'll land on their feet. But we will charge them for *treason*, *espionage*, and conspiracy to murder *bald eagles* if they talk to *anyone*. Just as we would now.

AP: What in God's name did you find in Philadelphia that could justify this?

BD: A new researcher brought us a new project.

AP: Oh, and he's replacing me?

BD: *She's* replacing you.

AP: I'm being ousted by a *woman*? Are you kidding me?!

BD: She gave us the answer.

AP: What are you talking about?

BD: What she's made… It will end the war. And it will end every other war before they even happen.

AP: *That's* what you said about Predictive Algorithms!

BD: I was wrong, Anthony! What you have is an idea. What I have now is a fact. Reality. Something I can hold in my hand, something I can point to and

say, “This is the answer to all our problems! Every threat that our country will ever face!” All you can give me is possibilities.

AP: [*resigned*] ...But you’re not scrapping the project entirely.

BD: Never have a plan without a backup plan. Prepare for every eventuality. Isn’t that what you’re going to help us do?

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

SG: This doesn't have to be *all* bad. I really do want to figure out *how* I got here, more than *anything*. Maybe figure out how to get home. I just… wish I had a choice in the matter. As long as this project is a secret, he’ll keep who *I* am a secret, at *all* costs, which means *I’ve* got to keep who I am a secret, too.

Which… I guess, might be okay? In the end, I’m always going to do the work. And Donovan’s organization seems like the best way to do it. [*excitedly*] There’s just so much more to the universe than I ever understood before! And I can’t wait to figure it all out! I mean, so as long as this experiment is running, let’s treat it like one!

Ahem… [*formally*] Subject one: Sally Virginia Grissom. Age 27, born February 19, 19[redacted] in Adams County, Iowa. Graduated 20[redacted] with a Doctorate in Theoretical Physics from MIT. Resident physicist SSC for two years...

...No, that sounds too formal, too melodramatic. Ehhhh, Let me start over.

My name is Sally Grissom, and I think I accidentally invented time travel.

...Wow. Hold on. This is *really* dumb. I-I hate all of this. I don’t want to be here! I don’t want to live in some secret town in the middle of the desert! I don’t want to live in the 1940s, I just want to go *home*. I want to worry that I left the oven on. I want to get stuck in traffic. [*emotional*] I want to stand paralyzed in the grocery store aisle, unable to tell the difference between Cheerios and the generic brand. I want my life back. And I want to charge my goddamn phone!

[[SFX: static distortion]]

The rub of it is, I’m not even sure I can *get* home. Not unless I take the long way. [*sigh*] Just in case anyone from my time finds this, and you’re wondering where I’ve gone... This is where I am. If you’re looking, I’m not saying… don’t try to find me, but I will say that the odds are against you. And I hope you won’t mind if I take a crack at getting home myself.

I’m a smart girl. I’ll figure it out.

[[SFX: tape recorder stops]]

ars PARADOXICA is created by Daniel Manning and Mischa Stanton.
Episode 01: Hypothesis (remastered) features -

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Reyn Beeler (Chet Whickman)
Rob Slotnick (Bill Donovan)
Robin Gabrielli (Anthony Partridge)
Katie Speed (Esther Roberts)
Zach Ehrlich (Jack Wyatt)
with special thanks to Isabel Atkinson

Special thanks to Julian Mundy, Mark Rizzo, and Dylan Winter. Original music by Mischa Stanton and by Eno Freedman-Brodmann.
ars PARADOXICA is brought to you by The Internet: Everything you could ever want to find… And some things you don't!

10 16 26 06 18 | 04 20 26 01 | 14 11 03 | 08 06 08 15 21 03
WEATHER: cloudy

02: Blackout

WRITTEN BY DANIEL MANNING
DIRECTED & SOUND DESIGN BY MISCHA STANTON

[[SFX: tape recorder start]]

SALLY GRISSOM (SG): Uh, hi. This is the thing, the... Diary, thing. January 17, 1944. It's Monday, and it's damn cold. There's no heat in my house. I've asked to put in a work order, but it seems like every GI is off on other assignments. It always seems like there's a swarm of them buzzing about, but never when you actually need 'em. I scrounged up a couple of blankets from the infirmary, but I can only wrap myself so thickly and still work.

My first few months here have been... decidedly miserable. Sure, when I first got here, I was welcomed with open arms, but ever since the second week or so, I can feel myself frozen out–pun definitely not intended. I mean, I have never seen a more hostile group of people in my life! Not a one of them will speak to me unless under a direct order. My lab assistants spend a single day with me, speak in the tersest of tones, and then refuse to come in the next day. The room full of men and women that are so far removed from any concept I have of a "computer" I barely understand, glare at me. Just stare me down until I run from the room.

Even civilians stop conversing when I enter a room. And it's not like there's no social life here, there is! The other people, they throw dinner parties, they drink, they dance,and I don't. I'm left out in the cold. Pun still not intended. I swear, it's like high school all over again.

At first, I thought that they were under orders not to speak to me.It would have been a little cruel, trapped living as a pariah in a secret desert town of geniuses, but I mean, I'm from the future, I guess I can understand that. Y'know, for the sake of avoiding paradoxes, sure. Keep me isolated. For the integrity of the universe, and so on. But a few weeks ago, I just kind of snapped. I couldn't stand it anymore. So I stormed into the Director's office... Well, stormed into the administration building and demanded to be escorted to the Directors office by the receptionist. She told me he wouldn't be back for another three days, so I left and came back, she gave me directions, then I demanded that the big stoic guys guarding his door let me in, and THEN I stormed into the Director's office. I was all set to start yelling at him for the injustice, for the indignity of keeping me in solitary confinement, but... He hadn't given any order. Turns out everyone just hates me. Yep, exactly like high school.

All these people here, I feel like they don't trust me. They don't know where I'm from, but they notice that something's off about me. It's something deep in their unconscious, I guess. I'm uncanny to them. And that wards off any attempt at making living here with people a little more bearable.

And because I'm left all alone, there is absolutely nothing for me to do here. I know I'm not in 20[redacted] anymore. But it is just so paralyzingly boring during the hours that I'm not at work. Day in, day out, it's the same: work, crunch numbers, fiddle with the machine, talk to barely anyone, come home, eat, slump down in my room at the end of the day and try to pretend that the radio in the corner of my bedroom fills in for the panoply of entertainments so vast it would make these neanderthals' heads spin. Now all I have are the same four or five staticky AM stations that we get here, and none of them are ever clear enough to hear much. There's too much electromagnetic interference from the experiments in town. Seriously, any of you from the 40s listening to this wouldn't believe what we've got. It might as well be magic. Goddamn, I miss the Internet...

At least the work is keeping me sane, but only barely. The technology in 1944 is pretty rudimentary, all things considered. And the Standard Model that I'm working from won't even be theorized for another twenty years or so. But the laws governing the universe haven't changed, so I guess it's all the same... Well I'm pretty sure that they haven't changed... Actually, the whole "laws governing the universe" thing is pretty up in the air right now.

I suppose we'll find out today. The test of the newly-spec'd machine, which we've been calling the Timepiece, is in a little less than five hours. After three long, lonely months, I finally feel ready. The first phase is supposed to chart tachyon measurements, look for more disturbances of spacetime like the one I rode in on. The idea behind the whole thing is...

[[SFX: static distortion; low rumbling]]

What is that? Wha– OHMYGOD–

[[SFX: electromagnetic pulse; static distortion]]

--yeah? Okay? Okay cool. So, something just knocked out the power is my room... Looks like the whole town too. I think whatever it was gave off a weird electromagnetic pulse that fried the spool I was just using. I tried listening to it, and all I got was this, like...

[[SFX: Sally approximates static distortion]]

But we shield all of our equipment lockers with copper mesh, and there was a spare spool or two in there. Is it weird that the first thing I did was replace the wire spool on my personal audio recorder...? Nah, I'm probably fine. It's just been a while since I spoke to anyone else, I guess.

There's still a weird buzz on this one though, I wonder which project caused this...

[[SFX: knock knock; door opens]]

GUARD: Dr. Grissom?

SG: Yeah?

GUARD: You're needed down by the computing pavilion.

SG: Me? Are you sure?

GUARD: Very sure, ma'am. The Director asked for you personally.You'll get instructions when you arrive. He's assembling a team to figure it out.

SG: A team, huh? Find a lot of volunteers for that one?

GUARD: I'm not sure, ma'am, I was sent to collect you.

SG: Mmm...Ca-can I bring my recorder?

GUARD: I'm sorry, what?

SG: This thing. Can I bring it with me? I've got an idea.

GUARD: I guess, if you want to lug it all the way over there–

SG: Then hold on. Let me grab a few other things.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

SG: ...and we should be good to go! See, this will send the audio signal through the microphone,onto the tape, routed through this device here, and back through to my headphones. It should amplify the EM distortion the closer we get to the disruption. Like a metal detector.

ANTHONY PARTRIDGE (AP): Yes, fine, that's great. We should get going if we want to stay ahead of it.

SG: Well... Say hi first.

AP: What do you mean, say hi?

SG: Into the microphone. Say hi. It's like a podca.... Like radio. Come on, do it!

AP: ...Hi.

SG: And who are we talking to?

AP: Do we really have to do this?

SG: Come on, it's for the record.

AP: Fine, whatever. This is Anthony Partridge, mathematician for the Office of Developed Anomalous Resources. We're looking for an electromagnetic anomaly in the town of Polvo, New Mexico. And we're doing it with a suped-

up tape recorder and a pair of headphones that make you look like an alien from Flash Gordon. Are we good? Can we get going now please?

SG: Yes, fine, okay! Let's go!

AP: Thank you.

SG: Sorry. I was just joking around.

AP: I can't believe I volunteered to babysit you.

SG: Hey, man, watch it. I can take care of myself. Done as much so far. I'm just trying to be nice.

AP: Oh sure, you're the girl with the silver spoon. Refocused our whole operation the minutes you got here. I bet you caused this, this whatever it is.

SG: Hey buddy, do you work here?

AP: What? What an idiotic question, of course I work here!

SG: Because for the past three months, I've been working–alone–on the most complex machine anyone in this world has ever seen, and not once did you lift a finger to help me. No one did. You all shut me out like a goddamn leper. So, even if this was me,please excuse me for making one mistake while I am up to my elbows in the primordial fucking forces of the universe.

AP: [sigh] Come on. The last pulse sighting was up this way.

SG: And what in the hell did I do to you all anyway? I am only ever trying to be nice. What could I possibly have done to deserve the entire town giving me the silent treatment?

AP: Come on.

SG: No, I'm serious! You must know. You volunteered for this little scavenger hunt. You know you're the first person to voluntarily stand next to me since the first week I got here? And even you treat me like I ran over your dog backing out of the driveway! Why?

AP: It's because the minute you got here, the Director threw out half our projects! We had to start from scratch! A year and a half of work, just out the window.

SG: Oh... Yeah, that makes a lot of sense.

AP: Some people weren't necessary to the new project structure so they lost their jobs. And if you're not working, you gotta leave the town. A lot of good people had to uproot their families. Ones still in town lost a lot of good friends. They won't be able to speak to them until after the war's over at least.

SG: I–

AP: So forgive us for having a little resentment. And you, "trying to be nice?" "Just joking around?" It's rude. It's just damn rude.

SG: I didn't know.

AP: What do you mean you didn't know?! You came in straight from the Director's orders. You had to know what bringing your work in here would do.

SG: The way I joined the project, it's... complicated.

AP: "Complicated?" What do you mean complicated?

SG: Well I–

[[SFX: EM disruption approaches]]

SG: There it is! I hear it!

AP: Where, I don't see anything. All the lights are still on in these buildings, we should be–

SG: It's this way! It's weak, but it sounds just like the pulse that came through my house. I'm gonna follow it. Are you coming?

AP: I guess so.

[[SFX: disruption fades]]

SG: So, what were you working on?

AP: I was in charge of a team developing an algorithm for predicting systems through an application of quantum mechanics.

SG: You were trying to predict the future based on different choices and math?

AP: Just in a well-educated guess sort of way. It's not like you ask the formula about what you're gonna have for breakfast tomorrow, or what color shoes you were wearing when you met your husband. More like, which countries are likely to be at war in a hundred years.

SG: How close did you get?

AP: That's classified.

SG: Okay, but... come on. What's the least classified thing you could predict?

AP: Well, we predicted we'd have a polio vaccine by the end of the decade.

SG: Wow, really? That's great! Shame for FDR though.

AP: What do you mean?

SG: Because he had... I mean... Never mind.

AP: Well, when you arrived, the Director shut down the project.We assumed you had come up with a better algorithm.

SG: Well, I definitely see how my machine might supplant what you were doing, but I didn't know.

AP: Listen, I've been here for a few years. I know the rules. What the Director says, goes. But I don't have to be happy about it.

SG: You don't have to take it out on me.

AP: I'm allowed to be resentful of the girl that's displacing me.

SG: I didn't mean to displace you. I'm not trying to displace anyone! I just took a job, man!

AP: What? You just "took a job?" You don't just "take a job" at this place, waltz into Bill Donovan's office and ask if they're accepting résumés. No one makes it to Polvo by accident. Where are you from? Where did you go to college?

SG: MIT.

AP: I've had my eye on every kid in that school with a twinkle in his eye for the past five years. When did you graduate?

SG: Twenty fo-our...

AP: 1924?

SG: Uh.... Uh-huh.

AP: You received your PhD 19 years ago?

[[SFX: disruption pitch rises]]

SG: Uh, can this wait until later? I think I've got something.

AP: By "something," do you mean a keen ability to lie? Because I've got news for you.

SG: No, I think... I think the disruption is moving!

AP: What are you talking about? Give me those.

[[SFX: Anthony puts on the headphones]]

AP: All right, what am I supposed to be listening for?

SG: It's very slow, but you can see that even if you're not moving, there's still an almost-imperceptible Doppler shift on the signal. I'm going to boost the levels hereto amplify the interfering signal.

[[SFX: disruption intensifies]]

AP: Whoa! Was that you, turn it down!

SG: That wasn't me, I didn't do anything!

AP: It's growing!

[[SFX: disruption intensifies, then recedes]]

AP: Damn, you're right. It's moving. Actually, I think that... Do you have some extra paper? How about a map? And I need you to boost the clarity of the signal.

SG: You have something for this?

AP: As a matter of fact, I do. Last May, everyone here got into really esoteric forms of radar detection and I was working on this targeted broadcast identifier that I could repurpose to track a similar signal if I substitute...

[[SFX: disruption intensifies, then recedes]]

SG: So if you overlay that vector with the campus, it looks like the disruption is moving south-southwesterly, and it's heading... right toward Site 2.

AP: That's predictably terrible.

SG: Just perfect. My machine is testing there in just a few hours. Damn it. What am I gonna do?

AP: Well, it's moving slowly enough that we could briskly amble over to the test site and still beat it there by a matter of hours. If it's some kind of weapon, I think we could figure out some way to disarm it...has anyone actually seen anything?

SG: I think everyone else is trying to get the town back online, and the few that aren't are collecting data from as far away as possible. We're not far now, though. It should be near the Grant Park playground. You mind babysitting me a little while longer?

AP: Let's see where this goes, at least.

SG: Off we go!

[[SFX: Sally whistles "Hi-Ho"; disruption intensifies, then abruptly stops]]

AP: Ugh... Seeing the playground without children, is just... Unsettling. Are you picking up anything?

SG: Huh.

AP: What's it doing?

SG: That's the weird part. It's gone.

AP: What do you mean, it's gone?

SG: When we walked onto the blacktop. It just stopped.

AP: What happened? Did you see anything?

SG: I don't think so... Hold on. Let me try something.

[[SFX: disruption begins, stops; start, stops]]

SG: Yup, this is it. This must be the eye of the storm.

AP: So we're dealing with the invisible. Do you believe in ghosts, Sally?

SG: Not really. I don't have much belief in anything I can't prove.

AP: I had a grandmother who claimed she specialized in the occult. Used to read our palms every Christmas, to tell our fortune for the coming year. I'm sure she'd be breaking out the candles and asking us to join hands by now.

SG: And you? What do you think?

AP: I think that spirits of the dead probably have more pressing matters than moving rocking chairs around.

SG: Then I guess we've ruled out ghosts.

AP: (laughs) I'm glad that's marked off the list.

SG: So are things ever straightforward around here?

AP: There was a month in '41 where there wasn't much going on.I was bored out of my skull. At least this thing's giving us plenty of notice. It's moving at about 0.88 miles per hour, so we've still got a few hours before it gets to the test site.

SG: Wait... When is it supposed to get there?

AP: About 3 PM this afternoon, if it keeps moving at the same rate.

SG: Yup. Nope. No. This is nonsense, this is–nope. I'm done.

AP: What are you babbling about?

SG: The test today. We're cycling field generators. The schedule puts boot-up at 1500 hours, on the dot.

AP: So, what are you suggesting? Whoever sent the disturbance wants to sabotage the test?

SG: Partridge, I don't think the disruption was a sabotage... I think I'm getting screwed by causality again.

AP: Do you ever make sense?

SG: I think it's a side effect.

AP: Of what?

SG: The Timepiece prototype... I think it's residue left over from the test.

AP: What is that supposed to mean?

SG: The prototype gives off large amounts of electromagnetic radiation when it's activated. If something goes wrong this afternoon, it's conceivable that the disturbance isn't moving toward the test site, it's moving away from it... But backwards?

AP: That's complete and utter hogwash. The test hasn't even happened yet! How are we supposed to... Sally, what exactly is your machine supposed to–

SG: Can you show me the map you plotted the disruption on?

AP: This one?

SG: Can you extrapolate it? Draw a line across the whole map, as far as you can go.

[[SFX: Anthony messes with maps]]

AP: Well, by the looks of it, it traces a line... Right across here.Goes... Goes right through Philadelphia, near Cincinnati, I wonder if they've experienced any strange phenomena like this...

SG: Goddammit.

AP: ...You've got something you're not telling me, and I'm getting real sick of it.

SG: We've... we've got some real cutting-edge technology now. Something new.

AP: How wonderful for you, but that doesn't explain how something that goes wrong later makes our lives difficult now. You might have fancy machines but you're not magic! What's your secret? What's in Philadelphia? What the hell are you working on? Just tell me!

SG: It's classified. And you wouldn't believe me if I told you.

AP: Try me!

SG: It's a time machine I brought with me from the future.

[[Beat.]]

AP: Really?

SG: If I was lying, would I really pick something so ridiculous?

AP: Well... The Director wouldn't need a predictive algorithm if he could just see history first-hand, I guess.

SG: Like I said, I didn't know.

AP: And you think, what, your test exploded backwards through time?

SG: Well it broke when I got here, and it wasn't designed for time travel in the first place. I had to rebuild it with contemporary parts. So maybe something goes wrong with the test. The capacitors overload, and send a burst of energy radiating out from that spacetime event. The wave of tachyons would travel out in both directions in time, and half of them would be drawn back in through time towards the Rainbow project back in October.

AP: Fine, then. Great. So I guess cause and effect work backwards now.

SG: I'm still figuring that one out.

AP: So our problem should be solved, right? If we just don't turn on the machine today, the disruption won't have existed in the first place!

SG: Yeah, but then what happens to us? Right now. If we don't turn on the machine today, we'd have no reason to be out here deciding not to turn on the machine today.

AP: A paradox.

SG: I can't change things. If I change the past in the slightest, who knows what would happen to my future? So... Are we doomed? Is this like, fated to happen now? What do we do?

AP: Well, there's two way's I see it: either you can change what's coming, or you can't.

SG: Helpful.

AP: If you can't, then we're screwed either way. But what happens if you don't turn on the machine this afternoon?

SG: You know, I don't really know. Either I fade out of existence, or everyone dies, or the whole universe ceases to exist.

AP: Sounds to me like you're caught standing in both lanes of traffic.

SG: Yeah, tell me about it.

AP: Well, is there a chance nothing would happen?

SG: What do you mean, nothing would happen? Everything has to happen.

AP: What if paradoxes, causes and effects, just don't matter? Tonic water is disgusting and gin is for drunks, but put them together and you get something amazing.

SG: But then how would this happen?

AP: Then how would any of this happen? You came from the future, doll. You already started to change things. Your molecules displaced the air around you, you ate food that wouldn't have been eaten. Hell, you made me lose my job.

SG: Sorry about that, by the way.

AP: It's all right, but if you're looking for a good reason to change the future, you're plum out of luck. It's already happened.

SG: So right now, here, this is me deciding: I'm going to cancel the test. The machine won't turn on.

[[SFX: disruption intensifies]]

SG: You hear that, universe! I don't care about your laws of causality! Do your worst!

[[SFX: disruption crescendos, then recedes]]

AP: I don't think the universe can hear you.

SG: Then I guess I'm not gonna die. At least, not today.

AP: Don't fret. Everyone dies eventually.

SG: When you can travel in time it just seems a lot closer. I guess we should call the Director. He'll have to cook up a pretty good story.

AP: He won't need to. It's too dangerous to carry out a test with all this radiation around the base. Happens more often than you might think. He'll reschedule it for sometime next week. Gives you time to fix your machine.

SG: By the way, uh, don't tell anybody. About me being from the future.

AP: Well I was just about to call the Polvo Gazette...

SG: I'm serious. I can't let a secret like that leak. Director's orders.

AP: Then why'd you tell me?

SG: I needed to tell someone. Poor judgment call, mostly. But I feel a lot better. So can we keep this between us?

AP: Sure. And I'll talk to the town,about lightening up on you. You'll need the help to analyze all this new data by next week.

SG: You have no idea how much I would appreciate that.

AP: So the Director knows? That you're from the future, I mean?

SG: Hah. How else do you think I got here?

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

SG: Three o'clock on the nose. Any minute now.

AP: Do you want a beer?

SG: Yes please.

[[SFX: Anthony pops two beer cans, hands one to Sally]]

AP: So what should I be looking at?

SG: The machine, I guess.

AP: That's your Timepiece?

SG: This is it, yeah. The disruption should be moving through the east wall over there right about now.

AP: And you turned off all the power?

SG: Right before I unplugged the machine from absolutely everything else. If something happens, there's no way it could be us. I should've grabbed goggles, but... I'm sure we'll be fine.

AP: I've got a camera rolling, and I grabbed a Geiger counter too. I was concerned about 'em getting fried, but I couldn't resist the chance at some damn good data.

SG: Say whatever happens destroys the lab. Won't we get in trouble? For destroying equipment, or... everything?

AP: Sally, this is what we're here for. If we're doing good work, they'll replace anything that gets destroyed.

SG: So, what, you just have infinite money?

AP: Not quite. It's all the taxpayers' money. But the Director always replaces what gets broken, gets us what we need.

SG: Outside of the occasional electromagnetic catastrophe, it sounds like a scientist's paradise.

AP: Not quite.

SG: I mean, you could speed things up by replacing the calculator girls with a couple of transistors, but all things considered, it ain't half-bad.

AP: You know, it's just... You see a lot of military trucks, but not a lot of civilians.

SG: The Director's got my number. I'm probably stuck here more than you are... which means by that logic, you're also all stuck in here with me. Welcome to my hell.

[[SFX: disruption enters]]

AP: Did everything just get... redder?

SG: Here it comes, okay, watch this!

[[SFX: the disruption reaches a crescendo, then an unsatisfyingly tame pop]]

AP: That was it?

SG: That was it. 1502 by my watch.

AP: Did you know that would happen?

SG: The blue flash? Not a clue.

AP: Come on, what were you expecting?

SG: I had even money on mechanical failure and spontaneous bear attack.

AP: Shame no one was around to see it.

SG: We were around to see it. We saw it, so it happened. I think that's enough.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

SG: Diary of Sally Grissom, January 17th, 1944... it's past midnight so I guess it's the 18th. My regular entry for today was destroyed, so I'm re-doing it. I couldn't make anything out of that old tape, but I'll keep it in the file anyway. Maybe someone some day can figure it out.

This one is going to be short, because I've had a long day, and I'm exhausted. I'm nursing what I think is the single most wicked headache humankind has ever known.

[[SFX: static distortion]]

So here's what I'll say: I made a decision today to not do something. I acted through inaction. And I think I changed history?

[[SFX: static distortion]]

I feel like I'm breaking some kind of ruleset for the universe, but nothing of consequence has happened yet. I didn't fade away, I didn't disappear. Does that mean I've made the right choice? I've got no idea what the right choice even means anymore. Who knows? Maybe history doesn't care that I'm in it now. I don't really know yet. So I need to do this for myself. Make decisions like I could possibly know what I'm doing. Which I can't. I can't be bothered with what the universe wants to happen. And if we're all still here in the morning, then maybe I was right.

[[SFX: tape recorder stops]]

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ars PARADOXICA was created by Daniel Manning and Mischa Stanton.
Episode 02: Blackout features -

Kristen DiMercurio (Sally Grissom)
Robin Gabrielli (Anthony Partridge)
with special thanks to Isabel Atkinson

Original music by Mischa Stanton.
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08 12 02 20 16 23 13 06 | 05 03 09 15 22 05 03 11 | 13 14 16 16 01 26 22 16 03 | 19 08 07 21 13 06 19
WEATHER: sunny

03: Trinity, Act I

WRITTEN BY DANIEL MANNING
DIRECTED & SOUND DESIGN BY MISCHA STANTON

[[SFX: tape recorder starts]]

SALLY GRISSOM (SG): The system we're proposing... it generates a field that negates the effects of what I'm calling the Grissom mechanism. Essentially, masses within the field localized to a spatially-consistent region are pulled along a timelike curve towards regions of spacetime with a high supersymmetric density. Project Rainbow inadvertently created such a region by catalyzing a singularity-like reaction among the particles present—

BILL DONOVAN (BD): *[jumps on her presentation]* Sally. Sall- Sally. SALLY.

SG: Is something wrong?

BD: You're doing it again. You've got more syllables than a silk-tongued thesaurus. I can't understand a word you're saying.

ESTHER ROBERTS (ER): With all due respect Director Donovan, it's a fairly simple concept. The experiment in Philadelphia two years ago created a Lorentzian manifold–

JACK WYATT (JW): –a Lorentzian manifold that is able to simulate a pseudo-timelike curve that breaks the Cauchy horizon, effectively creating a causal structure that...

BD: Stop. All of you stop. No one can understand what in Christ's name any of you are saying. It's all just babble. This isn't going to fly at the Oversight Committee inspection next week. They're coming from Manhattan, and I'm not going to be upstaged by that boom town.

ER: I've heard them calling it Judgment Day in the rec hall.

BD: They shouldn't. That's a habit I'd like you all to break. Demonizing the Oversight Committee doesn't do you any favors.

SG: Well, technically, we're not demonizing them, we're deifying them.

BD: You're not as clever as you think you are, and you underestimate the capacity of the men you're going to be speaking to. They are not easily stunned by playing hot potato with journeyman rhetoric.

SG: You want us to dumb down the science?

BD: I want you to make it something I can understand without a goddamn PhD! And don't call it the Grissom mechanism. You sound delusional.

ER: It's not like we have the time to teach an advanced course on the physics of relativity. The work we're doing here is at the forefront of scientific understanding. If you think it's difficult to understand, have empathy for we who have to explain it all.

JW: We wouldn't know half this stuff if it weren't for Dr. Grissom's research.

SG: You got pretty far without my... research.

ER: Director Donovan, we need the Committee to renew our budget. We need continued operational redundancy. I mean, we only have one inhibitor array. What if it breaks? What if it gets zapped back to the Eldridge? Dr. Grissom's prototype is the only thing like it in all of creation. And, Doctor, as an aside, what possibly could have inspired you to junk every iteration of this device before we started working for you?

SG: I... wanted a clean start.

BD: I read the reports every week and I still barely understand what you people are doing. I need you to relate to people.

JW: We're trying Bill, we really are, but they have to meet us at least halfway! We've got a ton of information that it took us years to understand. And now we're just supposed to condense all of that work into a bite-sized morsel for these fat cats to feed on?

SG: I'm sorry, Donovan, could I just get something clarified please?

BD: What's that, Doctor?

SG: You aren't talking about Manhattan *the island*, are you?

BD: I need you to tell me everything you know. All of it. Right now.

SG: I... I didn't realize. That's happening soon?

BD: Tell me. How much do you know from... What do you know?

SG: I can't say anything. You know I can't. I've given you the speech enough times before.

ER: What are you both talking about?

BD/SG: It's classified.

SG: I'll tell you when you're older.

BD: If you know about Manhattan, then you should know telling me won't stop any of it. It's too big now. You can get off your soapbox.

SG: Soapbox? We're talking about... *Trinity* is exactly the kind of thing I'm talking about, Donovan. What you think you know doesn't even compare with what I've seen. You can't even fathom what I know. Trinity might just be the worst thing we've ever done. As a *species*.

BD: Just tell me: does it end the war?

SG: Sure, fine. Yeah. It ends the war. It ends your whole preconception of war. It turns war from a boxing match into a chess game, feigning stalemate from now until the end of time. You should feel right at home.

[[SFX: Sally slams the door behind her]]

JW: ...So... Should we—

BD: Just get out.

ER/JW: *[babbling as they exit]*

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

SG: Diary of Sally Grissom, July 9, 1945. I'm stuck. Donovan wants me to design a practical demonstration of the Timepiece, and I have no idea what I'm supposed to do. I've been banging my head against a wall for hours, but nothing's tumbled out. It was relatively simple to work out the principles of pulling objects to the right time in the same place–everything gets pulled back to Philadelphia in 1943, but if you relate the rate of spatial acceleration to the Earth's motion and stop going backwards before you get to the Eldridge, you can land at a precise time. But for now, that's only in theory. In practice, it's a more difficult to literally perceive it, and immeasurably more difficult to explain it to someone else. It's a problem of light cones and timelines. Whatever you send back would just disappear from my perspective–I don't receive an orange I send myself today, because I never did yesterday. Of course, in some different version of the timeline I did receive the orange, but it's not part of my history. It's not like you could track that kind of stuff between...

[[SFX: static distortion]]

SG: ...problem of light cones and timelines. Whatever you send back disappears, and it's a crapshoot whether you'll be around to see something arrive. Like, an orange appears on my desk, right? What do I do? Do I just wait a day and send it back to myself? That would just loop back on itself again and again, aging a day at a time until the orange shrivels into dust. If I get a new orange to send back, do I have to make sure it's the same orange, but a day younger? How do I know I'll make the same choice of fruit? How do I know there isn't some poor Sally Grissom out there somewhere among the Blind Eternities who wakes up one day drowning in a sea of oranges? So you

see the problem. I've got Roberts and Wyatt already working overtime to get a new prototype running before Judgment Day, and it's unfair to them to throw another impossible task, so I've got to do this one myself. *[sigh]* I need a break from this.

[[SFX: radio tuning; sounds of a diner]]

ANTHONY PARTRIDGE (AP): Sally, you've got to lighten up. Judgment Day isn't going to kill you.

SG: Oh thank goodness. I've been breaking my back myself over this for months.

AP: No, that's about right. I've been through rigamarole like this before. It's terrible. Just not as bad as it looks.

SG: *[bitter]* Oh, what a relief! Thank you. You should give motivational speeches. Partridge, it's not just that I have to show off something impossible, I have to do it in front of my boss, the head of the OSS; the director of Strategic Sciences; and the goddamned president.

AP: Who?

SG: You know, the Oversight Committee: Donovan, Leslie Groves, Dwight Eisenhower?

AP: You mean General Eisenhower?

SG: ...Yes. I meant that. That is what I meant.

AP: Oh come on Sally, you're a horrendous liar. You know something, just spill it.

SG: No, what? Why would I…

AP: Does Ike becomes president?

SG: You're cra–no, you're crazy, man! That's… not–

AP: He does, doesn't he?

SG: What, I don't even know— *[more bluster]*

AP: You know, you ought to put that sort of slip-up to work. You could make a fortune gambling on horse races or something.

SG: I didn't think to bring a sports almanac with me.

AP: Tell me again what's impossible about this experiment.

SG: You just can't observe it. Either you live in a world where you didn't receive the item you send, which makes the machine look defective, or you live in a world where you did, which just looks like sleight-of-hand.

AP: Why not just send someone back an hour or so and have them come report? Guess a number written down on a piece of paper after the fact, or something.

SG: Well it's all about relativity, isn't it? The only reference frame that lets you observe the journey is the traveler. From an observer's point of view, either you haven't changed anything or the change was always a part of history. So the only way to show the committee how the machine works is to make them the subjects as well. And I don't want to deal with Bill Donovan's wife asking why her husband has vanished from the face of existence. That, or I might as well do a parlor trick. I'm just... stuck.

AP: It sounds like you could use a vacation.

SG: *[laughs]*

AP: How many days before your head's on the chopping block?

SG: Five days before Judgment Day. Six until I'm driven out of town in an unmarked black van.

AP: Walking away for a while is the best thing you can do now. Get some fresh air, get your head on straight.

SG: I... uh, I don't think my arrangement with Donovan gives me any vacation days.

AP: Who says the boss has to know? We'll make it like a company road-trip. I'll bring Helen. And we should bring our staff along. My man Quentin Barlowe has had his head in the trenches for months now, and I'm sure Esther and Jack could use some sun.

SG: Barlowe? The quiet one who follows you around the lab like a studious puppydog?

AP: He may be quiet, but he pulls his weight. Probably more than he should.

SG: Partridge, if all of us ran away in the middle of hell week, the project would completely run out of time. Which is just as ironic as it sounds.

AP: Well, you *could* always use the Timepiece, go back a few days, pick up where you left off...

SG: I don't even know why I came to you for help!

AP: Sally, trust me, you want to take a breather right here. You're stuck because you're in too deep. You all are. I want the three of you in front of

my house at oh-seven-thirty tomorrow morning. We're going on vacation. And you don't get any say in the matter.

[[SFX: radio tuning; dialogue is muffled]]

JW: Dr. Partridge, you are aware that Judgment Day is in four days time?

HELEN PARTRIDGE (HP): I tried to tell him you all wouldn't want to go.

AP: She successfully told me, and then I successfully ignored her. This is what you all need, and that's the last word.

ER: It's irresponsible to abandon the Timepiece presentation like this! We just don't have the time!

SG: Listen Roberts, Partridge is right. You'll be dead by Christmas if we keep working at this rate. Are you going to work yourself into an early grave, or are you going to get in the car?

[[SFX: car doors opening, everyone clambers inside]]

JW: Where are we going, anyway?

AP: Las Vegas, Nevada. A couple days of card games and drinking will do you all a world of good.

ER: Vegas? For what, craps and call girls? No thank you.

JW: Actually, that sort of business isn't legal in Vegas anymore. Roosevelt clamped down on it a few years back after the base opened.

AP: Glad to know Wyatt's an expert on Nevadan prostitution law.

JW: I'm not the expert! My cousin is a mechanic down there.

AP: Oh, sure. Your "cousin" is the expert.

JW: Are you calling me a pervert, pal?

HP: Anthony, stop...

AP: *[laughs]* All right, Jack. I'm just yanking your chain.

QUENTIN BARLOWE (QB): Dr. Partridge, are you sure this is a good idea? I think I might rather just stay home for the weekend.

AP: Not a chance, my friend.

ER: Uh, am I the only one that's never heard him speak before?

SG: Come on, guys. I know we're in crunch time here. But there's no sense driving ourselves crazy over this. Let's drive to Vegas instead.

JW: All right, but I'm not a pervert.

SG: Duly noted, Wyatt. What about the rest of you?

ER: Well I guess there's no sense staying behind if I'm the only one working.

SG: Brilliant!

[[SFX: car engine turns over, drives down dirt road]]

AP: So, what's the plan?

SG: Hand me that blanket.

JW: Plan? What do we need a plan for?

HP: Didn't you know? Dr. Grissom's not allowed out of town.

ER: What? Wait, that's ridiculous! Why?

[[SFX: Sally hides under the seats]]

JW: Dr. Grissom, what are you doing? / **SG:** Just, be cool! Move your legs! Move your legs. / **JW:** Hey, what! / **ER:** Dr.— aah! / **QB:** ...Good grief.

[[SFX: car brakes, Anthony rolls the window down]]

GUARD: Good morning Dr. Partridge, headed offsite?

AP: Yessir, taking some measurements out on the mesa. The wife packed a picnic.

HP: Good morning, officer.

GUARD: Morning, ma'am. Can you all show me your passes please?

[[SFX: all hand over their passes]]

AP: Here you go.

SG: *[whispers]* Ow! Don't kick!

GUARD: Seems a little cramped in there.

ER: Uh... Yeah, all the equipment in here sure does make for a tight fit...

GUARD: Everything's in order. You have a nice day, and be careful now.

AP: Thanks! You have a good one.

[[SFX: car drives off; Sally emerges]]

SG: Smooth, everyone. Real smooth.

[[SFX: tape fast-forward]]

ER: Dr. Grissom, may I ask you about something?

SG: Shoot.

ER: What's Manhattan?

SG: An island in New York. Aren't you from there?

JW: The first American ship to make an authorized visit to Tokyo Bay?

SG: Wait, really?

JW: The Centennial is this year. A lot can happen in a hundred years of diplomatic relations.

SG: And it's called the Manhattan? Huh.

ER: Dr. Grissom, you know what I'm referring to. When you and Director Donovan were talking. Manhattan, and Trinity.

SG: They're code words.

AP: Code words you shouldn't know about, by the way. Curiosity killed the cat.

ER: Yeah, but you guys know what it is. I'm not going to tell anyone. I'm just curious.

SG: You know how we're working on a cross-your-heart-top secret science project? So are they. Manhattan is like us. Trinity is their Timepiece.

ER: They're building a... a gadget like ours? Something for the war?

SG: Not quite, it's... a little more direct than ours.

AP: And I'm still not exactly sure what Trinity is. I only have a rough hypothesis because I've kept my ear firmly clamped to the ground, and it's my job to figure out what people will do next.

ER: So then, what is it? You said something about a deterrent? Changing war from a boxing match to a game of chess?

SG: Something like that.

AP: You're not going to tell her, are you?

SG: Not a chance. She'll find out soon enough.

[[SFX: tape fast-forward]]

ER: How could you possibly believe that?

QB: It's spelled out in the text, clear as day!

JW: Irrefutable evidence!

ER: But he can fly!

JW: So what?

ER: So what? Jay Garrick has to run everywhere! Do you know how much friction that builds?

QB: We're not talking about flying!

SG: We might as well be! Superman is faster than a speeding bullet.

QB: So is The Flash.

SG: Superman gets his powers from the yellow sun's radiation! The Flash got his powers from, what, heavy water?

JW: Hard water.

SG: Hard water! That's ridiculous! He got kind of wet and can run fast? Please.

JW: Well, what if they were running the race on a Kryptonite track?

ER: Irrelevant! The stuff they make up in the radio show doesn't count. Non-canonical.

QB: In a land race between the Flash and Superman, the Flash would win.

SG: Not a chance!

JW: The Flash can catch bullets!

SG: Superman doesn't need to! They just bounce right off him. Come on, Superman can fly faster than the speed of light!

ER: ...No, he can't.

QB: What are you talking about?

SG: I, uh... never mind.

JW: Superman is just a dope in a cape wearing his underwear on the outside.

ER: Jay Garrick wears a dumb helmet.

JW: You take that back!

[[SFX: tape fast-forward; car radio tuning, until a song comes on]]

HP: Oh, I love this one!

[[SFX: Helen sings along to “Til The End of Time”]]

Til the wells run dry
And each mountain disappears
I’ll be there for you to care for you
Through laughter and through tears

So take my heart in sweet surrender
And tenderly say that I’m
The one you love and live for
Til the end of time

SG: Helen... That was beautiful.

HP: You really think so?

[[SFX: tape fast-forward]]

ER: It's absolutely sweltering in here. How could they possibly be asleep?

HP: I think unconsciousness is the saner choice, in this heat.

ER: How long have we been driving?

AP: The better part of nine hours. Just another hour or so to go.

HP: *How* long?

AP: That’s why we left so early this morning honey. I wanted to make sure we got there before sundown.

ER: What possible benefit could the six of us get out of some resort town?

AP: Esther, have you ever been to an amusement park?

ER: I went to Coney Island a couple of times when I was a kid...

AP: When I was in college, I had this one midterm that was kicking my ass. Some report on orbital motion. And I just couldn’t finish it. I worked for four

solid days and by the end, I couldn't even force my fingers to write it. The deadline was breathing down my neck, I was losing sleep. And then on top of that, I had to leave town for Thanksgiving and visit my grandma in Pennsylvania. I didn't want to go, I wanted to finish that report, but my pop would've beat me halfway to Bethlehem if I didn't show up. And she lived right near to this amusement park. Dorney Park, I think. And my grandma, being the kindhearted old lady she was, saw me moping, and drove me over there to spend the day.

ER: And when you went, you rode on some roller coaster and had the stroke of genius you needed to finish the report?

AP: Not quite. But I did have a fun day. Not a care in the world. All my worries melted away. Did wonders for my mental health.

ER: So what does this have to do with the price of peas in Duluth?

AP: Well, Grandma Partridge was a wonderful woman, but it was at the end of her life, and she had grown a bit... forgetful.

HP: *[gasp]* She forgot you?

AP: She was supposed to pick me up at 5, but didn't come around until 8.

HP: Oh no!

AP: Three hours I spent in the parking lot, where the anxiety of losing valuable work time crept back.

ER: And that's where you had your epiphany?

AP: Esther, you're missing the point: I didn't have one. I got back to my room, sat down with my typewriter, and finished the paper. No epiphany. But the time loss forced my hand. There's no room for writer's block when the clock is ticking down on you. I didn't have time for self-doubt. I only had time to finish.

ER: So you aced the report?

AP: Not even close. I was a hair's breadth above failing.

ER: ...You're not exactly giving me a boost of confidence here.

AP: See, in the end I just didn't have enough to say about the topic. I would have failed whether I'd gone to Dorney Park that day or not. The point is, that you're going to finish your Timepiece presentation no matter what. Because you have to. Your team knows what it's doing. You'll wake up the next day, and you'll have succeeded, or failed, and then you eat breakfast, and then you move on with your day. But you guys were working yourselves into an early grave. This way, you still get to live.

[[SFX: tape fast-forward; car slows, engine turns off]]

HP: I just mean that you might have a better go of it at a university, somewhere you'd be appreciated—

AP: Helen, I don't want to talk about it right now. [louder] We're here, guys!

[[SFX: everyone awakening, yawning, etc]]

JW: What time is it?

ER: A little bit after eleven.

SG: So this is Las Vegas, huh?

AP: Is this not a thing people do where you're from?

SG: No, we did. It's just... different.

ER: I'll say. There's enough neon here that it's practically daytime. It's like Times Square in the desert.

AP: Okay, get your things, everybody. I'll check in, and we'll reconvene in the morning.

[[SFX: everyone gets out of the car; radio tuning; muffled sounds of a café; a bag unzips, sound focuses on dialogue]]

QB: He wasn't in the room when I woke up, I assumed he was out on a run or something.

ER: I haven't seen him since we parted ways last night. AP: Should we send out a search party?

SG: Wait, no, I see him stumbling towards us over there. Pretty sure he's wearing the same clothes from yesterday.

AP: Look who decided to show up this morning... early afternoon.

JW: Long night.

SG: Testing the Nevadan prostitution ban, I presume.

JW: I decided to check out some of the slots after you all went to bed.

QB: How much did you lose?

JW: Actually, I won $5... It was only after the gambling did I spend $4.75 on drinks.

SG: That's where they get you.

ER: They also get you on the slots, on the tables, at the hotel...

SG: This town is essentially an empty pit you're supposed to throw money into.

AP: Aw, lighten up ladies. This is supposed to be a fun weekend! Sometimes the pit throws money back.

ER: I don't think it's fun paying someone to possibly give you your money back.

JW: You could just have fun playing the games.

ER: I'd rather win them.

SG: You should play more blackjack then.

ER: Why?

SG: You know, basic blackjack strategy, counting and stuff?

ER: I'm not familiar.

SG: Oh man, any of you guys have a deck of cards?

QB: I've got one up in my room.

SG: Come with me, guys. I'm going to blow your minds with math.

JW: Didn't we come here to avoid doing work?

[[SFX: radio tuning; a dealer on a crowded casino floor flips a card.]]

DEALER: Twenty-one. Again. Well done, miss.

[[SFX: mild applause]]

ER: My lucky night!

[[SFX: radio tuning; the group at a fancy jazz place, drinking]]

JW: To Doctor Sally Grissom. For without her crazy card algorithm, we'd be sober and broke.

ER/QB/HP/AP: Here, here!

SG: Aw, I just showed off the numbers. It was Roberts that played the game.

ER: But without the help of you five I'd be drinking alone tonight.

HP: Alone and rich.

ER: This morning I knew just as much as you all did about the statistical analysis of blackjack.

HP: Not quite all of us. A bit more than me, I'd say. Just a tad.

QB: It was pretty scintillating stuff, actually.

SG: We should keep the card-counting on the down-low—uh… Private.

HP: I think we can each keep a secret by now.

JW: We've got a bleeding *time machine* in our backyard, for Christ sake.

[[SFX: Anthony smacks Jack]]

AP: Watch it!

JW: Oh come on, no one's spying on us.

SG: Another round for you all?

JW: Aaaaabsolutely.

ER: Here, take some dollars. Keep the drinks coming.

SG: Be right back.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

SCIENTIST: And they're the ones asking *us* if it's safe? I'll put down five bucks says the whole Southwest goes up in flames...

SG: *[in background]* Hey, could I get a sidecar, a dry martini, a French 75, two scotch with bitters, and a gin and tonic?

BARTENDER: Coming right up.

SCIENTIST: ...And I might as well put *another* two on the whole thing not even working. By now, I'm not even sure that—

SG: That's a fancy recorder you've got there.

SCIENTIST: Yeah, it's... top of the line.

SG: Use it for dictation often?

SCIENTIST: Work stuff, yes. Excuse me—

SG: What do you do?

SCIENTIST: I'm a physicist.

SG: No way! Me too! Who do you work for?

SCIENTIST: The-the government. Out in New Mexico.

SG: How's that going for you?

SCIENTIST: I can't really talk about it.

SG: Okay, but... How's it going?

SCIENTIST: Well, I'm on whiskey number...

[[SFX: glasses clinking]]

SCIENTIST: That many.

SG: That bad, huh?

SCIENTIST: Sitting on a wobbly stool waiting for the end of days.

SG: I know how you feel.

SCIENTIST: I very much doubt it. I've seen the end coming. I know what happens when the primordial energies of the universe collapse on themselves. I know there won't be any escape.

SG: You feel like the building blocks of the universe are playthings in your hands, and it's going to rip the world in two. And you wish you could go back to working in theory, to writing equations in notebooks. You wish the world would stop taking knowledge meant to better mankind, and using it to kill each other. That about sum it up?

SCIENTIST: ...who are you?

SG: Like I said. I'm a physicist too.

SCIENTIST: Where did you come from?

SG: You're in Los Alamos, right? I'm in Polvo. Couple hours south of you. Same kind of stuff you're doing, but we're with ODAR instead of ACE.

SCIENTIST: I haven't heard of it.

SG: And no one here knows what you do. Except for me. So we'll call it even.

SCIENTIST: All those people... I see their faces in my dreams. Millions of voices engulfed by roaring flame. Their blood is on my hands. Their silence weighs on me. So I'm drinking. Drinking until I'm flat on my back, or the world ends. Whichever comes first.

SG: And which one does come first?

SCIENTIST: Keep your eye on the horizon tomorrow morning and you're going to see some serious shit. Might be the last thing you'll ever get to see.

SG: I don't doubt it.

SCIENTIST: They told me we were going to help end the war.

SG: It'll end it. It'll change the conversation. Evil men will always do evil things, but that's on them. Not you.

SCIENTIST: How do you know?

SG: If it helps, pretend it was a lucky guess.

[[SFX: glasses clinking]]

BARTENDER: Here ya go, sweetheart.

SG: That's my stop.

SCIENTIST: Enjoy your drinks, for however long you've got.

SG: Quite a bit longer than you might think. Take care.

[[SFX: The Scientist takes a sip and stares off into the distance; Sally walks away with her drinks]]

SG: *[in background]* Where'd they go? Guys? Guys?

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

SG: Diary of Sally Grissom, July 15, 1945. It turns out that our after-dinner chat wasn't taken too kindly by the casino staff. Who would have guessed they wouldn't appreciate us loudly babbling about cheating on the floor?

JW: You were the one who taught Esther to count cards!

SG: Which I guess might have been a little bit my fault. And so they kicked us out of the hotel.

ER: Not kicked as much as literally thrown...

SG: You know that you're not supposed to be listening to me record these, let alone giving color commentary?

JW: We're helping.

ER: We're helping!

QB: You're not.

SG: I found them outside the casino with our bags. They're ruddy with Nevadan dirt.

AP: Nice imagery there, Virginia Woolf.

SG: We checked into a new hotel–I hope the staff at the Last Frontier don't talk to the ones at El Rancho. That's where we are now. Unfortunately, it was the last room at the inn and the six of us have to share it.

ER: *[grabbing the mic]* Dr. Grissom talks in her sleep!

SG: Nope, don't want to hear it. Leave before I start telling this thing all of your terrible secrets.

[[SFX: exeunt, save Sally]]

SG: Ah, peace and quiet. Well, I still haven't figured out what I'm going to do on Judgment Day. It's been a nice break, but my head's not any clearer than it was when I left. I have to literally upstage a nuclear bomb, and the Timepiece just doesn't pack the same visual punch. If the Committee is expecting something like the A-bomb out of us, they're going to be disappointed. Our device doesn't knock down houses, level entire towns, or light up the night sky with the power of suns. I don't know what Donovan expects me to do, save pull a rabbit out of my–

[[SFX: door knock]]

AP: *[on the other side of the door]* Sally.

SG: What?

AP: You've been requested out here.

SG: I'm not done with my recording yet!

ER: Dr. Grissom, this is more important. Just come outside.

SG: What are you talking about?

[[SFX: door opens]]

CHET WHICKMAN (CW): Good evening, Dr. Grissom. You are under arrest for the violation of the Espionage Act.

AP: Our chaperone is here.

[[SFX: tape recorder stops]]

ars PARADOXICA is created by Daniel Manning and Mischa Stanton.
Episode 03: Trinity, Act I features -

Kristen DiMercurio (Sally Grissom)
Reyn Beeler (Chet Whickman)
Rob Slotnick (Bill Donovan)
Robin Gabrielli (Anthony Partridge)
Susanna Kavee (Helen Partridge)
Katie Speed (Esther Roberts)
Zach Ehrlich (Jack Wyatt)
Lee Satterwhite (Quentin Barlowe)
Cameron Scott Nadler, Barry Stanton, John French Williamson (additional voices)
with special thanks to Isabel Atkinson

Production help from Jake Stanton. This episode features the songs "Stardust," performed by the US Army Blues, and "Til The End of Time," performed by Susanna Kavee, as well as original music by Mischa Stanton. ars PARADOXICA is brought to you by the Internet: A series of tubes filled with cats.

03 23 02 07 | 07 10 02 18 17 18 05 23 01 22 | 11 01 09 01 | 22 15 17 09 07
WEATHER: windy

03: Trinity, Act II

WRITTEN BY DANIEL MANNING
DIRECTED & SOUND DESIGN BY MISCHA STANTON

[[SFX: tape recorder starts; car driving]]

CHET WHICKMAN (CW): So... You're mad at me. I get it.

SALLY GRISSOM (SG): What makes you think I'm mad at you?

CW: Well, for one, you've got the grimace of a pouty child, and two, you haven't spoken to me the the entire time we've been on the road. I've tried to give you your space, but would you please say something before we get back?

[[SFX: radio tuning; hotel]]

CW: My men and I are here to bring you all back to Polvo on the orders of Director Donovan.

SG: And you are...?

CW: Don't you remember me?

[[SFX: radio tuning; car]]

SG: I'm allowed to be mad when I'm being arrested and accused of treason for taking a day off.

CW: Only technically. I'm just bringing you back home.

SG: Well now that the silence is broken, what would you like to talk about?

CW: I don't know. Last time we spoke you were a little tied up– literally, if I remember correctly. How've you been?

[[SFX: radio tuning; hotel]]

SG: You were on the Eldridge!

CW: That's the one. Chet Whickman. Nice to see you again.

[[SFX: radio tuning; car]]

SG: Since then, it seems like I've gone from being tied up to tied down.

CW: You know we can't just let you leave. Anything you say, anything you do could be potentially catastrophic. You've been designated a national secret.

SG: I know that, I know... It's just...

CW: You're upset that I put the kibosh on your vacation?

SG: More upset that I'm stuck working for a guy that can send his goons to scoop me up six hundred miles away with the wave of his hand.

[[SFX: radio tuning; hotel]]

CW: You had your fun casino night, and now it's time to go home.

SG: You knew we left?

CW: Of course we knew. We knew you were leaving before you were off the base. Director Donovan sent me to tail you an hour after you flew the coop.

SG: So you just let us traipse around Vegas until you got bored? You guys don't have anything better to do?

CW: Ma'am please, don't question the chain of authority. The Director didn't have to let you leave, but he likes to give his people some freedom. I figured after you had your little run-in with casino security it was probably a good idea to extract you from the situation.

[[SFX: radio tuning; car]]

CW: Aww, Dr. Grissom, I'm not just any goon! We've got a bond. I was there when you fell out of nowhere. Well, not nowhere, but 20[redacted] is as much a nowhere as you can get. And I'm here now to get you back home safely.

SG: I seem to remember that when we met you were just a lowly seaman on the other side of the country.

CW: [chuckles] Well, after Philadelphia, I got a promotion, and I got relocated. Normally, they upgrade your clearance when you're need-to-know, and it turns out what I know, what I saw, meant that I had a need to do something else. I'm not saying they threw a black bag over my head and sent me across the country, but it sure felt that way.

SG: I'm no stranger to that myself. This isn't the first story of how my appearance in 1943 threw someone's life into turmoil.

[[SFX: radio tuning; hotel]]

SG: I can't believe this.

CW: If you come along with me now, I promise you won't be in any trouble.

SG: I DEFINITELY can't believe that.

CW: Okay, any more trouble than you're already in. Y'all have Judgment Day on Tuesday, you don't think you could just leave in the eleventh hour to go gamble with whores for the weekend?

ANTHONY PARTRIDGE (AP): Actually, Nevadan prostitution law–

HELEN PARTRIDGE (HP): Anthony!

[[SFX: radio tuning; car]]

CW: I traded endless sea for endless sand, and my feet have never felt more steady. Director Donovan isn't much for a placid managerial strategy. Always switches it up the second you get comfortable. It's never boring. And at least on land there's a much lower risk of drowning.

SG: Well, I'm not comfortable yet, so that bodes well for me.

CW: You seemed pretty comfortable to me back there. You've got friends, you've got a house, a job, I've heard that your research on the Timepiece is groundbreaking. I don't understand a lick of it myself, but I know what you're working on is streets ahead of anything else the world has ever seen.

SG: I've got one friend. And two lab assistants. I've got a one- bedroom dungeon, and a job that treats time off like time off the reservation. I'm a prisoner, and we both know it.

CW: There ain't no such thing as a free lunch, Sally. You should know that. All things considered, you've got it pretty good out here. You like doing all this brainy science stuff, right? Do you think any other place in the country will hire someone with a degree from the future? You'd be locked away in an asylum by now if you weren't with us. Some mad lady living on the streets of Philadelphia, insisting that she's from the future.

SG: You're saying I'd be worse off if Donovan didn't keep me locked up?

CW: I'm saying that Polvo gives you a salary, a house, and a good purpose.

SG: Not one that I chose.

CW: Maybe not, but I'll bet you a nickel it's the most fulfilling purpose you could find in 1945.

SG: Then maybe it's 1945 that's the problem.

CW: Well you're the scientist, right? Can't you figure out how to get yourself home?

SG: According to the world's foremost experts on the subject, the best way to get back to the twenty-first century is to wait five-and-a-half decades.

CW: Why?

SG: The Timepiece, our "anchor field inhibitor array," it was supposed to levitate things, not move them back in time. And because of Rainbow, the only direction I can travel is back. It only works for one-way trips.

CW: It's always like that with you geniuses. You try to make a hovercraft and end up with a time machine. What about building something else, to move you forward?

SG: It leverages a series of scientific mishaps to achieve a very specific result. The principles that govern its function are murky at best. Trust me, the only route home is a long wait.

CW: That's a bum rap, Sally. I'm real sorry.

SG: Thanks, Whickman.

[[SFX: tire pops, swerves, slows, stops, turns off]]

CW: Whoa, whoa whoa!

SG: What happened?

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

SG: Diary of Sally Grissom, July 15, 1945. Officer Whickman came to the hotel to arrest us and drive us back to Polvo. We were more than halfway there when two of the trucks we were driving in both hit the same sharp rock on the road. We're stuck in the middle of the desert. That's... I... End of entry. I don't really know.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

HP: What do you mean, staying here?

CW: I'm sorry ma'am, it's official protocol. No one else can even know we were out here. I've got to send the other men ahead, they'll be back for us by tomorrow morning. They can't fit all of us, so the rest will just camp in the trucks for the night.

HP: This is preposterous.

AP: It won't be so bad, honey. Hell, it might be nice to spend a night under the stars. We haven't done that in, what, four years? Since we were dating.

HP: I suppose so...

SG: I'd like to go back with the soldiers please.

CW: Sorry, Dr. Grissom, but I have strict orders not to let you out of my sight. Drs. Roberts, Wyatt and Barlowe, you're free to head back.

ESTHER/JACK/QUENTIN: Well if you're staying, Dr Grissom/I don't really need to get back/It's actually not that bad out tonight/I should really stay here.

SG: Guys, it's fine. Just because I have to stay out here doesn't mean you guys do. Go home.

ESTHER/JACK/QUENTIN: Okay good/Great/I really need to get back there.

[[SFX: they walk away]]

AP: So... Anyone have any marshmallows?

CW: That's the spirit!

[[SFX: radio tuning; Chet sets up a campfire]]

CW: That should do it.

AP: It's a beautiful night, isn't it?

HP: It's rather dark. I was hoping to see a few more stars.

SG: It looks like it's going to rain before the morning.

HP: Oh, that's a shame.

AP: Look what I found in my luggage!

[[SFX: sloshing bottle]]

SG: Is that a bottle of wine?

AP: Not just any bottle. A '28 Bordeaux.

HP: Anthony, you didn't!

SG: Didn't what?

HP: It's the bottle from our first date!

CW: Oh, fantastic!

[[SFX: Anthony uncorks the bottle, pours it into cups]]

AP: She was a singer for a jazz band at a little bar in town, the Soft Note. I used to go down there to work. I never liked working at home, or in a library.

So I would take my books to the Soft Note and do my work there. Of course, I never ended up getting any work done when Helen got to the stage.

HP: He would sit in a little booth in the back, hidden behind stacks of notes and books, and stare at me while I sang. I would see him and try to talk to him, oh but he was so shy...

AP: So when I started working for the government, I asked her out.

HP: He had just gotten his first government paycheck, and he took me to this incredibly lovely place. The plates, the tables, the decoration, everything about it screamed "lavish."

AP: I must have spent the whole damn paycheck on that meal.

HP: And the whole time he was gushing about the new job. He promised me that he would change the world for the better.

AP: And so I bought this, ridiculously expensive bottle of wine, and swore on it that I would use what I knew to make the world better.

HP: It's been gathering dust in a cupboard ever since. I can't believe you brought it with you!

AP: I was going to surprise you, but I never got the chance.

SG: So why drink it now?

AP: Now seems as good a time as any. We're doing the work I set out to do when I bought it, and I'm surrounded by the people involved. Officer Whickman for the government, Sally for the science, Helen for my passion.

CW: Hear hear!

SG: Cheers!

[[SFX: tape fast-forward]]

HP: I think I'm going to turn in. It's way past my bedtime. Don't stay up too late now.

AP: We won't.

SG: Oh don't worry, I'm right behind you.

[[SFX: Helen walks off]]

AP: You look like you could use about twenty years of sleep.

SG: It's just been a rough few days.

AP: I've been meaning to ask you about that. When I left my project behind, I was modeling predictive systems, and now... I don't have the first clue about what you're doing. What that machine of yours really does.

SG: Well, for a while now, we've just been trying to figure that out.

AP: You don't know how it works?

SG: Hey, Fleming didn't know he was inventing penicillin, did he? The Timepiece prototype sitting in the hangar, that's built out of my machine. The one that brought me to the past— I mean... To now.

AP: Right. What was it before then?

SG: I was working on this machine that would, in theory, detach bodies from the Higgs field—

AP: The- The who field? Higgs?

SG: Oh, um... It's... Let's just call it an anchor field. And this anchor field is what gives particles mass. I wanted a generator that would negate the anchor field.

AP: Anti...mass? Negate gravity?

SG: That was the idea.

AP: How'd you get from antigravity to time travel?

SG: Did you work on Project Rainbow?

AP: Only in the planning stages. I never walked onboard the Eldridge.

SG: Well, it turns out that you guys accidentally invented the wrong thing, too.

AP: A device that would cloak a battleship by bending light around it.

SG: Well, that worked almost too well. It bent light around it– along with everything else. It never sustained itself long enough to cause any long-term damage, but the moment or two that the Rainbow device functioned, it created a well that massively warped the surrounding regions of spacetime. And that moment proved to attract anything that happened to be untethered nearby relativistically-speaking.

AP: And that includes you, [redacted] years later.

SG: Exactly. The objects affected by the inhibitor field are drawn to the Eldridge like a magnet.

AP: So when an object is affected by your machine, it goes to Philadelphia in 1943?

SG: That's the principle we're trying to exploit with the Timepiece.

AP: What if there were a way to modulate the–

SG: –Modulate that acceleration to allow backwards movement to a specific time? Welcome to the conversation.

AP: And I thought Manhattan was cutting-edge. Screw the bomb, you're building a real-life HG Wells time machine. How do you account for planetary motion? You know, the Earth rotates around the sun at 30 kliks a second, how do you make sure you're not just zapping into empty space?

SG: That's been our big issue for most of this. Wyatt and Roberts spent their Fourth of July weekend synchronizing the Timepiece's acceleration with the Earth.

AP: No wonder they're tired. God bless 'em.

SG: But giving the machine a way to process those instructions has been difficult.

AP: Too complicated?

SG: Well, not to toot my own horn here, but where I'm from, our computers are way better at this kind of stuff. I don't mind spending an extra few hours waiting for our answers to compile, but having to send away to Harvard to get some punchcards read?

AP: I think you might be guilty of being a poor craftsman. Craftswoman.

SG: You've got no idea. You probably think 20[redacted] has acres of buildings filled with vacuum tubes.

AP: I know someone will have figured out an electronic Turing machine by then. They'll fit in your home. I get it.

SG: [laughs]

AP: So how are you gonna present that to the Committee?

SG: I really don't have any ideas. I'm stumped. I either put them through the time machine themselves, or... Do some kind of fancy trick that looks nice, but doesn't actually show the machine off at all? I don't know. But I think I'm gonna sleep on it.

AP: You'll get it Sally. You're good at what you do.

SG: Tell it to the committee.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

SG (DIARY): Diary of Sally Grissom, July 16, 1945. I'm back home now. The night in the desert was fun. Productive, I think. I've figured out what to present to the Committee. But more important than what we did that night was what we did this morning. This morning, we saw the world change.

[[SFX: early morning in the desert]]

CW: Sally! Sally, wake up!

SG: [drowsy] Mrrm, what is it? Are we there yet?

SG (DIARY): Whickman woke us up a little after five. Told me to get out of the car. He said that he felt bad about...

CW: ...I felt bad about ending your vacation early, so I thought I'd let you in on something special. Come with me.

AP: [yawns] What's going on? Where are we going?

CW: The middle of the desert. Won't be long now, hurry up!

SG: Won't be long for what?

SG (DIARY): We stopped on a cliff a few hundred feet from the trucks. The world hadn't yet woken up. It had just been raining, and the air was thick with petrichor.

CW: Okay everyone, keep your eyes on that horizon.

HP: What am I supposed to be looking for?

CW: Just wait a little bit.

SG (DIARY): Chet checked his watch. He tapped on the face, counting down to the detonation. And then...

SG: Woah!

SG (DIARY): In an instant, the sky lit up. As the plutonium core of Trinity reached critical mass, the resulting emission of heat and light turned night into day. There was a brilliant light in the distance from the direction of Alamogordo, reflected by the mountains around us. It was so bright I tried to avert my eyes, but something deep and primal inside me wouldn't let me look away. I've seen footage of the blast, but they couldn't prepare me for that explosion. They never could capture the colors. Reds and yellows more brilliant than I've ever seen. Wisps of violet and green climbed the fiery column into the mushroom, that damn cloud that forever after stands for civilization's capacity for self-demise. Now we are all sons of bitches. It took a minute for the sound to hit.

[[SFX: a 20-kiloton nuclear explosion]]

SG (DIARY): The ground shook. I covered my ears to diminish the roar of weaponized nuclear fission. And then the column dissipated, fading back into the bruised purple twilight. It was over. The twin reactions of terror and wonder on Whickman's face, the unbridled joy on Partridge's, the shock and terror on his wife's... After the burst, I don't think any of us said anything. About an hour later the MPs picked us up and drove us back. The newspaper that evening said something about a detonated ammunition cache, but everyone in Polvo knew what was going on. It was the beginning of a new era. Oppenheimer's crew were heroes–at least, they're supposed to be. Impressive engineers, undoubtedly. Were they heroes because they'll end the war? Maybe. Stalin and Truman and Churchill are divvying up Germany as I speak. And sure, Manhattan put the US first on the atomic weapon scene, but the only reason that Russia–or, I guess, the Soviet Union had their bomb is because we had ours. Mutually-assured destruction is just keeping up with the thermonuclear Joneses. I'm getting ahead of myself. I guess I'm the only person in the universe to know what happens in the next few decades, and there aren't many places I can appreciate that fact without being thrown into military prison or an asylum.

But the Oversight Committee wants spectacle.

[[SFX: phone ringing]]

Nuclear weapons are powerful not just because of the explosion or the fallout, but because of the deterrent. And so I gave them spectacle.

[[SFX: Anthony picks up phone]]

SG: (on phone) Partridge, I need a favor.

AP: (on phone) You got it.

SG (DIARY): Three envelopes, for Eisenhower, Donovan, and Groves. Inside each one was the sports scores from next Tuesday's newspaper and a statement of the Timepiece's technical acumen, signed by each of them a week from now. And of course, an unsigned version of that same letter. I told them to wait a week, check the scores, and then sign the new letter. It was proof that the Timepiece could send things back in time. At least, to the Committee.

SG: (on phone) How do your predictive models run with sports games?

AP: (on phone) What are you looking to do?

SG (DIARY): Partridge and I spent the last few hours before Judgment Day finding out that, with 99.8% certainty, the Cubs would beat the Phillies 7 to 3 next Tuesday. Not enough people appreciate the power of super in- depth statistical analysis. Then, I wrote up a form letter emphasizing the project's potential uses, and forged the signatures of the three of them to make it all

seem legitimate. The presentation went off without a hitch. I made sure Roberts and Wyatt weren't with me. I never told them what I did. They don't need that weighing on their conscience.

I hope we were right about the ball game. It's a gambit. If the Cubs lose I'm either incompetent or a fraud, and I'll probably get fired. If I pull it off, then I'm a genius. It takes a lot of work to set up something this risky, actually. It probably would have been more impressive to tell them. The things we do for funding. I've got a time machine and I still can't convince people to pay for it unless I lie to them a little. But the little lies make getting through to what we need that much easier.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

AP: Helen, what's wrong? You were so quiet the whole way home. Are you okay?

HP: You lied to me. You broke your promise.

AP: What? Honey, what are you talking about? When?

HP: Our first date. You promised me that your work would make the world better.

AP: I wasn't lying, Helen. I'm still doing that good work—

HP: I saw what those men were doing, Anthony. I saw it with my own two eyes. That is NOT good work. That is NOT making the world better.

AP: We didn't do that honey. That wasn't us.

HP: It's no different! Men like Donovan have men like you building machines like that. They're using your gifts and your hard work to build... That! That awful thing! Oh God, Anthony, we drank the promise wine just last night...It makes me sick.

AP: Honey, calm down.

HP: We're leaving. I'm packing now, and we'll leave.

AP: You know we can't just leave—

HP: I don't care! I don't care what those men have over you!

AP: I'm not leaving, Helen.

HP: ...What?

AP: They have my work now. I can't just abandon it. I have to stay.

HP: Anthony, you can't be okay with this. With what you saw.

AP: Of course not. It's terrible. But my work won't end up like that. They're just building a bomb. I can build so much more. And I'll watch over it, make sure they don't use it to hurt anyone.

HP: Are you really that naive? The army will do whatever they want with your work, and send you out the door with a fiver and a pat on the head.

AP: I can't leave this behind, Helen. It's everything I've ever worked for.

HP: Aren't I everything you worked for?

AP: You know that's not true. I worked for the betterment of mankind. I worked for science.

HP: ...That was the wrong answer, Anthony.

[[SFX: Helen leaves upstairs]]

AP: Rrrrgh!

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

BILL DONOVAN (BD): –What were they thinking? Jesus Christ, I should have Sally Grissom in a cell so long she'd meet herself. And just what in the hell was Anthony Partridge's role in this?

CW: He planned it, sir. Orchestrated the whole trip.

BD: What, to a resort town ten hours away right before the meeting that could well make or break this town? What possible reason could he have for that?

CW: It does seem particularly reckless. How did the Timepiece presentation go, sir?

BD: It was just... Just awful. They used Anthony Partridge's research to make safe bets on the Cubs.

CW: How did the Committee react?

BD: Groves was curious, ultimately bored. Ike lit up like a boy on a fat Christmas, but I have a feeling it won't last. It was a parlor trick, and they may not know it yet, but they'll figure it out soon enough.

CW: ...May I speak freely, sir?

BD: Sure, why not.

CW: I think Anthony might be trying to sink Grissom's team.

BD: What makes you think so?

CW: Well, like you say sir, there's no part of this plan that seemed like a good idea. And I know Anthony, and he isn't reckless.

BD: What are you saying... He's trying to destroy us from the inside?

CW: I don't think it's all of us. I think he's trying to destroy Sally.

[[SFX: tape recorder stop]]

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ars PARADOXICA is created by Daniel Manning and Mischa Stanton.
Episode 03: Trinity, Act II features -

Kristen DiMercurio (Sally Grissom)
Reyn Beeler (Chet Whickman)
Rob Slotnick (Bill Donovan)
Robin Gabrielli (Anthony Partridge)
Susanna Kavee (Helen Partridge)
Katie Speed (Esther Roberts)
Zach Ehrlich (Jack Wyatt)
Lee Satterwhite (Quentin Barlowe)
with special thanks to Isabel Atkinson

Original music by Mischa Stanton.
ars PARADOXICA is brought to you by the Internet: Just, don't read the comments.

08 11 09 10 | 04 16 24 | 17 19 02 15 04 26 15 03 26 | 03 06 25 10 22 16 21
WEATHER: windy

Curses

WRITTEN BY ALEXANDER DANNER & JEFF VAN DREASON
DIRECTED & SOUND DESIGN BY MISCHA STANTON

[[SFX: tape recorder starts]]

SALLY GRISSOM (SG): What do you want, Donnovan? Why do I feel like I'm in the fucking principal's office?

BILL DONOVAN (BD): I would like to attempt to have a serious conversation with you.

SG: Right, as opposed to our typical light and fluffy chit-chats peppered with nothing but chuckle-fuckery–

BD: A serious conversation begins out of a place of respect for all participants, wouldn't you agree? And a serious conversation means both participants take that mutual respect seriously.

SG: You respect me? Let me work. You were berating me about being behind like thirty minutes ago. I don't have time for this. I don't I don't even have time to think of a clever pun about how little time I have right now.

BD: I'll be brief. There have been some... complaints about your...professionalism.

SG: My professionalism?

BD: Specifically, your choice of unprofessional vocabulary.

SG: We've gone over this, Donovan. You want me to take the most complex scientific breakthrough in the history of the very thing I've only just discovered how to manipulate and water it down into Time Travel for Dummies.

BD: That's an entirely different issue. The fact is, your mouth produces two wildly different kinds of unlistenable jargon: it's either PhD gibberish or filthy profanity.

SG: Holy shit, I am in the principal's office. I invent time travel and you're going to scold me for saying H-E-Double-Hockey-Stick?

BD: You say a lot worse than that and it's become a distraction.

SG: To whom?!

BD: That's classified.

SG: Oh, give me a fucking break. What is it with you soldier boys? You get your dicks hard storming beaches but hear a little colorful language and you look ready to lose your goddamn lunch.

BD: That's exactly what I'm talking about. I don't know what kind of gutter-mouthed future you come from, but here in 1945, we respect people. It's all part of that serious conversation I told you about earlier. Respecting everyone involved and making sure they're comfortable

SG: It was Barlowe, right?

BD: What?

SG: Who complained. It was Quentin Barlowe.

BD: The people who contacted me about this issue will remain classified–

SG: People? So it's more than one...

BD: I have received several complaints.

SG: But one of them was from Barlowe because I was just with him and I was frustrated and swearing like a hungover sailor and then he bounced and then the next thing I know I'm being hauled into Principal Donovan's office by some crewcut jackboot fuckin' robot.

BD: I don't know what you're talking about.

SG: Wouldn't it make you feel better if you said "I don't know what the fuck you're talking about?"

BD: No.

SG: Have you ever even tried to fuck?! ...SAY fuck, Jesus Christ, I wish I could shove those words back into my mouth.

BD: You're not the only one. And you are going to try to do that very thing. You're going to try really hard not to be such a pottymouth or there will be repercussions.

SG: [laughing]. Who says pottymouth? Seriously.

BD: Sally...

SG: You've really never said fuck, have you?

BD: That's none of your concern.

SG: Right. "Classified." Got it. But actually that makes sense. You're probably not the only one. Barely anyone has. Man, the past is so uptight.

BD: I need to know that we have an understanding.

SG: I tell you what. I will personally promise that you won't receive any further complaints about my professionalism.

BD: So you're going to keep your foul mouth in check?

SG: That's classified.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

SG: Diary of Sally Grissom, August 18th, 1945. Here's the weird thing. I don't even think I swear that much. I do it when I stub my toe or lock my keys in my car or when I'm super stressed out because if I fuck up with the time machine my gory bisected torso is going to scare the shit out of a much younger me...

But after Donovan yelled at me, I had this thought: Swearing is great. Like when you really find the perfect combination of filthy curses, you feel like a fucking champion! That's scientific fact. I may have found my true calling. I didn't go back in time to win World War II or invent skateboarding or rock n' roll. I'm here to teach an entire generation of people how to throw up their middle fingers and say "Get the fuck off my train!"

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

ANTHONY PARTRIDGE (AP): Swearing is good for you? Come on, Sally, that's a bit rich.

SG: It's 100% scientifically fucking proven. These researchers in the UK did this whole study, asked 140 students to stick their hands in consistently cooling water while monitoring their vital signs. Half of them could swear, The rest had to stay silent. The 70 who were allowed to swear experienced a hypoalgesic effect that disrupted the link between perception of pain and the feeling of pain. Swearing makes you hurt less.

AP: That's malarkey.

SG: You'd feel a lot better if you could say "that's bullshit," but it's not bullshit. Swearing makes you feel better psychologically because it's an easy way to trick the brain into thinking you're doing something rebellious and exciting when you're really just... making sounds with your mouth just like you always do.

AP: Exactly. It's all just a string of syllables, which is all the more reason why there's no need to use them.

SG: No, that's all the more reason to use them, Partridge, keep up, goddamn it. Look at it this way. What's the difference between the words "poop" and "shit?"

AP: One is a word people we don't use in polite society.

SG: No, the answer is "basically nothing" aside from their components. They're synonyms, they mean the exact same thing. But one is acceptable to say and one isn't. One gets you in trouble, earns you disapproving looks in public, gets you written up or fired and the other just makes you sound like you're a potty-training toddler. The weird thing is, the potty-training toddler word is the acceptable one for us grownups? Swearing, saying "shit" rather than "poop," changes that. It fires up the amygdala–the emotional processing bit of your brain–triggers you to be on edge, allows you to express the paradoxical tension that comes with the powerful social taboo of not using certain coded words with our willingness to rebel against the establishment! In short, it gives you an insane rush to the head, all without facing any real kinds of consequences or danger.

AP: Didn't you just say it could get us fired?

SG: We're working on a time travel device for a top-secret government agency and you're worried they're going to fire us for using naughty words? Fuck that noise.

AP: Noise? Sally, that's not profane, it's surreal.

SG: It's an expression. You know, noise: interpreting specific oppressive conversation as indecipherable nonsense, AKA, bullshit. Come on, Partridge. Try it. Say 'shit.' See how you feel.

AP: Look, I can express my frustrations just fine. I have a large and complex vocabulary that allows me to express myself without recourse to vulgarity.

SG: Bullshit.

AP: What do you mean, bull.... nnnngh!

SG: Oh, so close.

AP: Why do you think I can't express myself?

SG: You're frustrated right now. So go ahead. Express your frustration.

AP: I–I'm very frustrated. I would very much like to go back to doing my actual job. But instead I'm stuck in a pointless and increasingly offensive conversation! You see? I expressed my feelings, entirely using socially acceptable vocabulary.

SG: But you *didn't* really express anything. You *explained.* That's not the same thing. The word "frustration" conveys a certain emotional data point, but it does so in a purely intellectual way. Saying "frustration" doesn't express frustration any more than saying... oh, hell, let's go with "adenocarcinoma." Any more than saying the word "adenocarcinoma" expresses the experience of gruesomely wasting away from stomach cancer.

It's that same bullshit notion that thinking should supplant feeling. But being a scientist doesn't mean you stop feeling things! It doesn't mean emotions don't get to you. It just means you feel very, very strongly about uncommonly esoteric topics. Science is a pursuit of passion. Discovery is a byproduct of passion. Knowledge is born of the love–yes, LOVE of knowing. If you haven't experienced that, then you're in the wrong profession.

AP: Sally, this...you're exhausting me. And we have so much to do.

SG: Look, I know Donovan is riding your ass to turn out results, but I personally guarantee this will make you feel better. [Pause] Stop sulking. I need your help with the others.

AP: The others?

SG: I'm going to teach them all how to swear like proper goddamn vulgarians.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

SG: Sometimes I think the hardest part about being a time traveller working in the past is that I can't even use the single most important word for people in our specific circumstances, pursuing our specific course of research to have in our lives: "Mindfuck." It's the only word that really describes what it feels like to have your entire way of looking at the world, your entire understanding of identity and causality, and and and...and everything! Just turned upside down and kicked out the window. Our daily routine involves actively dwelling on the causal complexities of temporal paradox... What else could you call that?

These people need this word. They just don't realize it.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

SG: So the more combinations of curses you string together, the more powerful your swearing will be and the better you'll feel. It also helps to have something to focus on. For example, most people involuntarily swear after suffering a minor injury. I'm sure you've all experienced that before, right? Barlowe, what do you say when you have a painful accident like that?

QUENTIN BARLOWE (QB): Ouch?

SG: Yeah, okay, but wouldn't you rather put some oomph into that ouch? 'Fucking ouch.' Try that?

AP: This is ridiculous and I won't have any part of it.

SG: Oh. Oh my god. Excuse me. Oh my fucking god. You were one of the people who complained to Donovan, weren't you?

AP: I don't know what you're talking about.

SG: Wow. I had no idea you were such a spineless pussy.

AP: Don't say that.

SG: [laughing] Pussy? Partridge, you're a pussy if you can't even hear pussy, let alone say pussy. Just be glad I didn't use the C-word.

AP: C-R-A-P?

ESTHER ROBERTS (ER): Oh, boy.

SG: We've got a lot of work to do.

ER: I'm not clear on how this is helping us do science.

SG: Because it's improving your general mental stamina. It's a method for exorcising the pent-up frustrations that impede productive rational thought by fully expressing them in a neurochemically efficacious way.

ER: Okay, I can follow that.

AP: Really, Esther? Really?

ER: I'm a woman of science. I'm game for an experiment.

SG: Let's start simpler. Quentin, how about a simple "goddamn it." Try that.

QB: What am I asking god to damn?

SG: The... ouch. The booboo. The accident. I don't know, what difference does it make?

AP: You're torturing us, Sally. Do you understand that you're torturing us?

QB: I just don't see the point if it's not directed at anything or anyone specific.

SG: You're thinking about this a little too literally. You're not actually commanding god to damn something.

QB: But it'll be more effective if I think I am, right? If it makes you feel powerful because you're transgressing, won't it be more effective if the transgression is larger? If I'm not just taking God's name in vain, but actively committing an act of hubris?

ER: He's got you there, Sally.

SG: You know, let's leave the blasphemy angle out of it for now. Maybe that's just too much power for Barlowe.

QB: Am I still supposed to be cursing?

AP: No. // **SG:** Yes.

QB: Sh...shit?

SG: Okay! Shit! Yeah, we can work with that! A perfectly serviceable general purpose epithet. Stub your toe? Spill your coffee? Shit! Miscalculate your coefficient of friction? Double shit!

And that's fine. Basic swearing for basic troubles. But what if you've broken your toe? That hurts a lot more than your basic declaration of "shit" can convey. But you can append it with modifiers to enhance its power! And there's room for nuance, too. For instance, which would you rather be: a dipshit or a dumbshit?

AP: I'm sure nobody wants to be either.

QB: Uhh...if I had to be one, I guess I'd rather be...a dipshit?

SG: Very good! Why?

QB: Because it's sort of..cute sounding, I guess? It sounds more innocent.

SG: That's exactly right! It's less harsh. A dipshit is someone sort of harmlessly useless. Whereas a dumbshit actively undermines more competent people through their foolishness.

ER: So, can we move this along to the advanced class?

SG: If you feel ready for it.

ER: Oh, I'm fucking ready.

QB/AP: [gasps!]

AP: Esther, I'm shocked!

ER: Why?

AP: You're...not Sally.

SG: What is that supposed to mean?

AP: Nothing, just that Esther's...you know?

QB: A proper lady.

AP: Exactly. Esther comports herself.

SG: Ouch.

AP: I'm sorry, Sally.

SG: You're apologizing to the wrong person.

ER: You know he's totally full of shit, though, right?

SG/AP: What?

ER: He's full of shit. Partridge curses plenty. If he doesn't realize I'm in the room? If he thinks he's alone, or there's just Jack, or Quentin, or Bill Donovan? He swears like anybody. Once you or I walk in, though, or at least once he realizes I'm standing there...

AP: Okay, I confess! I've said A words and S-H words and B words and F words! I've said all the words! When I was thirteen, my mom made me suck on a bar of soap for an hour and a half *after* my father paddled my a...my behind to teach me a lesson. Can we drop this now? Can we move on?

SG: Okay, point to you. That time you actually expressed yourself.

AP: And without a single swear word.

SG: But we still haven't addressed the issue of *why* no swear words. Because it obviously has nothing to do with the personal aversion you've been claiming this whole time.

AP: It's consideration, Sally. Just basic, gentlemanly consideration.

QB: You know. For ladies.

SG: What conversation are we even having? I've been telling you this whole time that it's fine to curse around us!

AP: Around you. But you're...you.

ER: And I'm me.

AP: Right.

ER: Anthony, I swear all the fucking time. I just don't swear around you. Because I know you're too dainty to handle it.

AP: What is this, you've got some kind of secret second life where you go around spewing profanity?

ER: Well...

SG: Every woman has a secret second life.

AP: Not every woman!

ER: Oh, I know that look. The "not my wife" look. He's thinking about how Helen tells him every little thought in her pretty little head, and would never let a dirty word pass her lips–

AP: She wouldn't!

SG: Newsflash, Partridge. Helen can drop an F-bomb like a pro.

AP: A...she can what?

SG: She says "fuck," Partridge. I've heard your wife say "fuck." Multiple times.

ER: So have I.

QB: Me too.

AP: ... Okay, fine... you swear, Esther swears, my wife swears, all the women swear! Welcome to the modern world. Aren't we proud of ourselves?

SG: Empirically, I'd have to say "yes."

ER: I'm honestly looking forward to this advanced lesson.

AP: [long sigh] Fine. Go ahead. Let's have the advanced lesson. What's it about?

SG: Well, it's about "fuck," of course.

AP: So, it all just comes down to sex then?

SG: What? No. It has nothing to do with sex. That's not the the point of good vulgarity. It's just about the aggressive viscerality of it. So, if I call someone a motherfucker...

AP/QB/ER: Whoa!

ER: That's going a little too far.

SG: ...I'm not actually accusing them of incest. I'm just calling them an asshole in the extreme.

QB: Can't I just call them an asshole?

SG: Are you kidding me? Did you hear that reaction when I said "motherfucker?"

QB/ER: WHOA! // **AP:** Come on, Sally!

SG: See the difference? And again, like with "shit," you can pair "fuck" with all sorts of suffixes and prefixes. So when we want to go another step beyond

dipshit and dumbshit, we can take it all the way to “dumbfuck,” to describe someone who is not only intellectually detrimental, but intellectually detrimental in an interpersonally noxious manner.

And there’s infinite suffixing possibilities from there! Fuckhead, fucknut, fuckwit, Fuckup, fuckload, fuckton, fucktastic, fuckpuddle, fuckwind, fuckwad, fucksplosion, fuckadoodledoo! Or, going the other direction, you can connect more than one vulgarity to create such evocative insults as dickshit, taint-goblin, assballs, or shitfucker!

QB: Taint-goblins? Are those...

SG: They don’t always have to make sense. The idea is just to shout something horrible rather than losing your shit.

QB: Wait, does that mean...

SG: IT MEANS HAVING A TANTRUM. Jesus Fuckpuddle, Barlowe, stop asking dumbfuck questions, okay?

QB: Yes ma’am. Sorry for. For being .. such a dumb...butt?

AP: Dumbass.

SG/ QB/ ER: [gasp]

AP: Yes, well you’ve pushed me into it. I’m at my limit and I simply can not take it anymore. You’ve insulted my manners, you’ve insulted common decency, you’ve insulted my wife, so I’ll insult your ears. You’re all behaving like ...like little shit-bastard kangaroos with double dumb asses and goddamn Jesus Christ dipstick-shits for heads up your butt... sticks.

ER: Buttsticks?

AP: I hope you all go to hell and...and and and lick assfucks while sucking goddamn dumb shit ball wads.

SG: ...Jesus Christ, Partridge, no wonder you didn’t want to swear. You are really bad at this.

AP: Fuck you, Sally!

SG: Ah, there we go. That’s much better. Now how do you feel?

AP: How do I feel? How do I feel? [Pause]. I feel great, actually. I’ve I’ve wanted to say that to you since the moment I met you.

SG: Aww. Thanks, Partridge! Fuck you too.

ars PARADOXICA is created by Daniel Manning & Mischa Stanton.
Curses featured –

Kristen DiMercurio (Sally Grissom)
Katie Speed (Esther Roberts)
Robin Gabrielli (Anthony Partridge)
Rob Slotnick (Bill Donovan)
Lee Satterwhite (Quentin Barlowe)

Original music by Mischa Stanton and Eno Freedman-Brodmann.
ars PARADOXICA is brought to you by The Internet: What happens here, doesn't stay here. It is broadcast, loudly, everywhere.

04: Bullet

WRITTEN BY DANIEL MANNING & MISCHA STANTON
DIRECTED & SOUND DESIGN BY MISCHA STANTON

[[SFX: tape recorder start]]

SALLY GRISSOM (SG): I would have thought that two years living in Polvo would have left me jaded. That nothing could surprise me anymore. God, I'm still having trouble putting it all together in my head. I guess I should start from the beginning. One of the superconductive coils had cracked during a power cycling test. Roberts and Wyatt were both off-site for personal reasons, so I had signed Barlowe over to my team for an extra set of hands. We were replacing the coil and Barlowe was—dammit. I didn't do the intro thing, did I? I'm just gonna start over. Diary of Sally Grissom, September 21, 1945. I would have thought that...

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

SG: —So Donovan asks me, he says, "Electric guitars give me a headache. Don't you go deaf, all that racket?" But it's not about preserving your hearing, man, it's about feeling the music- hand me those pliers, would you?

QUENTIN BARLOWE (QB): Okay. Can you show me what you're doing here? Is this how you arrange the-

SG: Yeah just— back up a little.

QB: Sorry.

SG: Thanks. And so I tell him, it's about letting it drown out your consciousness, letting your emotions out, letting that inner animal take hold of you—

[[SFX: static distortion; bullet through time; Quentin falls the to floor]]

—which he finds utterly ridiculous. I think he was almost offended. "Self-control is a virtue," he says. "to which we all must strive." Does that guy ever loosen his tie? I mean, come on. Hey Barlowe, do you remember what degree we set the drift response to? Barlowe? Oh wait, I got it. It's 53.7 degrees. How could I forget 8 times the square root of 45? Anyway, I know we're a science community, and we're all dedicated to logic and knowledge, but everyone's gotta let off steam once in awhile, right? ...Right? Barlowe? Hey, are you ok—OW!

[[SFX: Sally hits her head on the Timepiece]]

SG: After my vision cleared, I called the medics, but Barlowe was gone by the time they got there. More importantly, my team was down another member,

the Timepiece was still broken, and apparently it kills people now. That's cool. Was it something I did to the machine? I wouldn't be able to forgive myself if I moved some spring that shot out at him or I triggered some previously-unknown death ray function. I don't know, accidentally inventing things tends not to work out for me.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

CHET WHICKMAN (CW): And you didn't see or hear anyone else come in?

SG: No, sir. My head was under the Timepiece.

CW: So you didn't actually see the infliction of Quentin's mortal blow.

SG: Didn't see the–what? No.

CW: Why don't you tell me what you did see, then.

SG: I don't know, we were working on the prototype, and I looked up and he was bleeding on the floor.

CW: And how long had Quentin been working here with you?

SG: Today was the first day. Roberts is in New York with her mother, and Wyatt is visiting a processing plant for one of the materials we need. I filed the paperwork two weeks ago. You must have seen it.

CW: And of course, you didn't shoot him, right?

SG: No, of course I wouldn't... wait–shoot him?

CW: Not even accidentally?

SG: No, I–shot him? We were in here troubleshooting, all the doors were sealed! We don't even have a gun in here! How could he have been shot?

CW: That's all I'm trying to find out, Sally. So you tell me. You were there.

SG: That's all that happened was. I turned to see him and I hit my head, and I was out cold until I called the medics. Barlowe was really shot? I thought he got hit by a part that flew off the machine, or something.

[[SFX: Chet opens a folder]]

CW: Our coroner pulled a forty-five round out of Quentin's chest. He tells me it was fired from your garden-variety 1911.

SG: A pistol? There was no one close enough to hit him but me. Hell, there was no one else in here but… oh.

CW: You see why I'm asking you all of these questions.

SG: I didn't shoot him. Come on. That's not funny. You know I didn't.

CW: Then the only other explanation I can think of is a magic bullet.

SG: Chet, tell me you know I didn't shoot him.

CW: The body of one of our own in the morgue, and I don't even know what to tell his wife.

SG: Barlowe was married?

CW: Yeah, to June? For about two years?

SG: Oh. I didn't know.

CW: You've met them. A bunch of times. We've both been at parties with them together.

SG: Oh... Yeah, I suppose we have.

CW: Can you give me anything I can tell her?

SG: Like what?

CW: I don't know. A perfectly good explanation for all of this.

SG: Perfectly good isn't how things work around here. You know that.

CW: Then give me something else. Anything else.

SG: I... I don't have anything to say. But I will find out what happened.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

SG: Diary of Sally Grissom, Sunday, September 16, 1945. I just got back from Quentin Barlowe's funeral. It was... Solemn's not really the right word. I mean, on the scale of social gatherings, funerals are the polar opposite of, say, soccer matches. But this one was... It just felt... awkward? See, none of us really knew Barlowe very well at all. Not even Partridge had much to say about his own lab assistant.

[[SFX: radio tuning; outdoors]]

ANTHONY PARTRIDGE: I've worked with Quentin for the better part of a year now. He... Was a reserved man. Quiet. But always dedicated. His record-keeping skills were fantastic, and I never once doubted his ability to... do.... science. He struck me as a man who lived in his head a lot. I didn't know what he thought of what we were doing. But he kept doing it, so he must have believed in it.

PRIEST: Thank you Dr. Partridge. Would anyone else like to speak?

ESTHER ROBERTS: [in distance] I will. [walks up to microphone] Quentin was a kind man. Always courteous. Always just wanted to be out of everyone's way. I wish he had been more in the way. I wish I had seen him more.

PRIEST: That was lovely, Dr. Roberts, thank you. Anyone else?

SG: Um... I was the last person to see Bar... Quentin alive. He was helping me in my lab. He... I didn't know him very well. He seemed... Nosy. While we were working that day, he was always over my shoulder. I guess that means he was... A dedicated seeker of knowledge? I don't... I'm sorry. I found him off-putting and a little bit creepy. He was standing so close to me I'm surprised I wasn't hit instead of him. I'm sorry for your loss, June.

PRIEST: Well... Thank you for speaking from the heart, Dr. Grissom. I'm sure we all appreciate it. I believe Mrs. Barlowe is ready now, with a few words of her own?

[[SFX: June storms off, crowd gasps]]

PRIEST: Mrs. Barlowe?

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

SG: It was a train wreck. I don't know what they wanted me to say. Maybe that I always valued the way Barlowe never stole my lunch? Or that his death was especially interesting, from a scientific perspective?

...Oh man, was dying the most interesting thing Quentin Barlowe ever did? That's dark.

But I'm sure he had family, or friends, or something, right? Everyone's got a backstory. Everyone's a person. But all through the speech, June Barlowe just glared at me with this seething, boiling, laser-focused anger. She stared through my soul.

You know the feeling, where you're at a party, and you're trying to talk to someone about a miserly uncle over the din, when Smash Mouth abruptly stops blaring from the speakers, and you're in the middle of saying a word that sounds like a particularly offensive slur out of context, and everyone stops what they're doing, and turns to stare daggers at you, and anything you say past that point would only serve to make the situation worse, so you stand there dumbly, slack- jawed, terrified of saying anything more, and nobody's said anything in the past 25 seconds, and the exit is at the other end of the room so there's no way to escape? That's the kind of stare it was.

After the performance of my one-woman show–"Sally Bombs at the Funeral"–I slunk down into my seat among the rows of black-clad scientists. I thought my punishment from June Barlowe was over, but as we filed out, I saw her near the houses and she stared daggers at me the entire time I passed. I got out of there as fast as I could and rushed home. I know June

wasn't going to hurt me, but I might have hid in the corner of my bedroom enshrouded in blankets for an hour or so... Just to be safe.

You know what? I'm going to prove it. I'm going to figure out how he died so they can see it wasn't my fault. I just need to build... Something. Something to see what really happened.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

SG: Dr. Sally Grissom, experiment log, time is uh, 2:57 AM, on Thursday already, damn. Thursday, September 20, 1945. So this is the first trial of the Tachyon Activity Projector— the TAP. I made it from an array node, an oscilloscope, and a cathode ray tube I borrowed from another project. Well, I say borrowed... I wonder if they've noticed. I'll tell them... I dunno. I'll tell them it was for science. So what I have here is a system that scans for tachyon activity...

[[SFX: static distortion]]

SG: ...amplifies that light, and reproduces it on this display. In effect, it allows you to see into the past. At least, I think it does. I've spent the last sixty-seven hours in the realm of theory and then inhaling a whole lot of solder fumes, so it's time to put on my big scientist goggles and try this sucker out. I hope this works. I'd hate to end up back in Philadelphia.

[[SFX: TAP turns on]]

SG: All right, still here, still in one piece, good signs. Picture coming into focus. And... Wow. There it is. I have it set to about ten minutes ago. There's a surprisingly vivid image of me, grabbing tools from the bench. Weird. But also AMAZINGLY cool.

[[SFX: cart rolls]]

SG: So this thing is location-locked, because it uses Timepiece's stabilization models. It took some high-falutin' arithmetic to sync all this stuff with planetary motion, and I didn't want to spend months with new calculations so I just sorta... Plugged it right in. Literally. Point is, I can only see wherever the cart is, and that's attached to the Timepiece, because anchor field inhibitor arrays don't grow on trees.

Okay well... I'm convinced. TAP: total success. Now I've just gotta get Whickman down here—

[[SFX: tape fast-forward]]

CW: Wait a minute Doc. So you're telling me you built a window through time.... Out of a television?

SG: The way I see it, if you're going to look into the past, you might as well do it with some style. I had to crack open the Timepiece and plug this thing in, so you might wanna be carfu—

[[SFX: Chet turns on the screen]]

SG: And hey, look at that, it's on.

CW: This shows what's in front of us. But in the past?

SG: 7:27 AM. That's when I came in this morning. You can see me opening the door right over there.

CW: I would have been in my kitchen drinking coffee... This is going to change everything. About surveillance, about communication. Everything.

SG: Can you keep this under wraps? At least for a little while. Give me time to make sure this isn't too disastrous in the wrong hands. Or the right hands. Anyone's hands.

CW: That's breaking about a half-dozen regulations. You really need to stop asking me to sit on all of your secrets.

SG: Well, you should stop... being in a position to be... secret- ed on.

CW: Secreted on? Sally, that's disgusting.

SG: *(sarcastic)* Real funny guy.

CW: If this thing does what you're saying, then surveillance systems would be a distant memory. Who needs a live transmission when you can just watch the past happen?

SG: Well, it routes tachyon responses through the Timepiece, so you need to be within a cable length's distance. And besides, I'm not sure I'm okay with the government having eyes on everything that's ever happened after 1943.

CW: I don't mind. I've got nothing to hide.

SG: That's what they always say. No one's got anything to hide until Big Brother's got a time machine.

CW: Big what-now?

SG: Jesus, you all haven't read Nineteen Eighty-Four yet? What are you, cave people?

CW: I'm sorry, I feel like I've missed something.

SG: There's a–just... if you see an author named Orwell next time you're in a bookstore, pick it up. And you think I'm prescient... you want to see what happened to Barlowe or not?

CW: I'm anxious to see your little gizmo work its magic.

SG: And then you'll clear me for Barlowe's death.

CW: [laughs] Doc, you never seriously thought you were on the hook for that, did you?

SG: No, I.... wait, what now?

CW: I knew you didn't kill Dr. Barlowe when you told me so. You're not dumb enough to tell a lie like that outright. And besides, if we really suspected you... I don't know if this conversation would be so friendly. Are you telling me you made all of this because you thought we suspected you of murder?

SG: Well... maybe a little bit. A teeny bit. Stayed up three nights in a row. No big deal.

CW: Just, take me to the scene of the crime, and then you should get some sleep.

[[SFX: Sally tunes the TAP to the right time]]

SG: Alright, I'm tuning to to last Friday. What was the time? As best we know. I know it was late morning but I wasn't checking my watch when Barlowe hit the floor.

CW: Based on your testimony, medical evidence, and our own investigation, we figure it happened around 11:34. Man, what'd I'd do to have a visual record of any place at any time. And I thought closed-circuit TV was fancy. Does this thing do sound too?

SG: Whickman, just getting a picture was hard enough. Dream a little smaller.

CW: Hey, I'm just security. What do I know about your science-doodads?

[[SFX: fine-tuning the TAP]]

SG: Okay, I'm starting after the event and going backwards– there's the paramedics rushing Barlowe's body into the lab, then putting him down and leaving, there's me calling them telling them not to return, I'm screaming then returning to work, the pool of blood sucks back into Barlowe–

CW: I get it, Doc. You're playing it backwards. Skip to the end.

SG: Okay, here it is. Going forward a second at a time, Barlowe's standing there, Barlowe's standing there, he's falling to the ground.

CW: I hope I don't have that look on my face when I die.

SG: ...Don't get shot by a bullet coming out of nowhere?

CW: I'll put that on the agenda. Can we get anything more precise?

SG: I'll tick back a tenth of a second at a time.

[[SFX: the TAP clicks as if it were changing slides.]]

CW: Wait— there. That's the bullet. Turn the cart around. Where was it fired from?

[[SFX: Cart moving]]

SG: It looks like... Thin air.

CW: Keep going back.

[[SFX: click click]]

SG: And then it... disappears.

CW: How does that even happen?

SG: I'm going to tune it as precisely as I can get with this prototype. We're getting into microseconds.

[[SFX: there's just a bunch of clicking, you get the idea]]

SG: It's there, then it isn't. [click] There, [click] not there.

CW: But where did it come from? I don't believe that bullets just materialize out of thin air. Not yet anyway. Did your machine do this?

SG: Probably.

CW: But the bullet comes through at full speed! Someone had to have fired it. right?

SG: Hell if I know. My box only looks into the past. If the bullet really did come from a Timepiece activation, it would have been fired from the future, relative to last Friday. Plus, Barlowe's death caused changes in the timeline... there's no way to know when the original bullet is from, or what circumstances led to its being fired.

CW: You're saying that we've got no idea?

SG: As far as the fantastically theoretical scientific principles I've been flying by the seat of my pants with for the past two years, yes. I mean, we know

where, because the Timepiece doesn't move anything in space, but that's all I could really tell you. Anything else is detective work. Time detective work.

CW: What now?

SG: Well, I know it isn't up to me, but I think we should try to keep whoever shoots the bullet that hits Barlowe from shooting the bullet that hits Barlowe. If they even still want to.

CW: But we can't know who it was before the crime even happens.

SG: It's certainly more difficult than your average murder.

CW: So... that's it? We go home and hope no one commits a murder that we can't solve?

SG: Unfortunately.

CW: That feels so wrong... It feels like giving up. I hate this.

SG: Also, we could probably search any staff coming close to the test site for guns.

CW: Protocol requires all security personnel to carry a service pistol whenever they're on duty. I'm armed right now.

SG: Aren't you breaking a half-dozen rules just by being here? CW: You're right, but I'm certainly not going to be the one to shoot Dr. Barlowe.

SG: No guns means Barlowe can't get shot.

CW: Something that already happened.

SG: Well, if you're going to insist on looking at it so linearly...

CW: You're saying if we ban guns from the facility it'll, what? Bring him back to life?

SG: Not a snowball's chance, but some other version of Barlowe might yet survive.

CW: But then, of course, you'd never build your time-TV in response.

SG: You see how that line of reasoning quickly spirals out of control. Look, either Barlowe gets shot, or he doesn't. Either way, from our perspective, he's dead. My solution keeps him alive, somewhere in spacetime. No guns, no bullets, no one gets shot.

CW: Which one's the cause, and which the effect?

SG: My problem is I keep facing them in the wrong order.

CW: You're a tough woman to work with, Doc. My head's spinning.

SG: Join the club.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

SG: So we found that we had no idea who shot Barlowe. The bullet came out of nowhere, so all we could figure was that it came from the future. Oh right! Note to self. New idea: Time Detective. Anyway, so I had been alone in the lab for a few hours after Whickman left because I had still had questions that needed answering.

[[SFX: radio tuning; TAP running, cart rolling]]

SG: So I'm under the Timepiece there, and Barlowe is here, so the shot came from... Hey, what's that—

[[SFX: hangar door opens, closes]]

SG: Hello?

[[SFX: footsteps]]

SG: You know I can hear you, right? I'm not really down for the "dramatic entrance" game.

JUNE BARLOWE (JB): It's time we had a chat, Sally.

SG: Wha-OW!

[[SFX: Sally hits her head on the Timepiece again. Comedy.]]

SG: June Barlowe! I-goddammit, every damn time! Who let you in here?

JB: I let myself in.

SG: I, uh, take it this isn't social call?

JB: Can I tell you what showed up on my doorstep this morning?

SG: Milk? Old cousin? Lost puppy? Some fourth thing before you inevitably tell me anyway?

JB: It was a letter and a package. The letter, straight from the Director's desk, informed me that I would 48 hours to vacate my home here in Polvo. Without Quentin, evidently I have no right to continue living here. No one said a single word to my face. The doorbell rang, and that was that. The package contained keys to a new house, three hundred dollars, and all the papers I could ever need, preparing me for my new life.

SG: Your new life?

JB: They're making me take on a new identity. It's for my "protection." No one really does leave Polvo, they take severance seriously here. I'm now Alice Hayworth of Carlsbad, New Mexico. Have you ever been to Carlsbad, Sally?

SG: I... I can't say that I have.

JB: Neither have I! I'm sure it's a lovely town. Alice Hayworth loves it there, but I'm not so sure about myself!

SG: I don't know where you're going with this. What does this have to do with me?

JB: You? You killed my husband! You killed the man I shared the two happiest years of my life with, and now your operation is taking away my own name!

SG: Okay, hold on just a second. One, I didn't kill your husband, not by a long shot. And two, please don't ever think that ODAR is "my operation."

JB: Don't lie to me, Sally, please. There was no one else in the room. You shot my husband in cold blood. And now I'm being sent away to cover up your crimes.

SG: No! That wasn't how it went down at all!

JB: It's not? Then what was going on, Sally? What, were you sleeping with him?

SG: Whoa! Not even. June, you need to calm down.

JB: What are you doing here, Sally? Do you think I'm stupid? I'm just another face in the crowd to you.

SG: No, you're... you're June! You're part of the town. You're...

JB: Say anything. Say one thing you know about me. Hell, say something about Quentin.

SG: Well, you made great mushroom canapés at the 4th of July party–

JB: You shut the fuck up right now. Is that what you think of me? You define me by the food I make? I don't even cook that often. You think I'm some disposable housewife! You don't care about people like me!

SG: June, I don't think like that! I'm so sorry about what happened to Quentin. But I wasn't sleeping with him. And I certainly didn't kill him.

JB: You can lie all you want, Sally. It doesn't matter what you say, because you're going to make this right.

SG: That's fine! I can talk to Donovan. I'm sure we'll be able to work things out. You won't have to change your identity, you can stay in Polvo, close to... Close to your husband.

JB: No, we're going to fix this. You and me. Here and now. With your time machine.

SG: [stammers] No, why would you–That's not a–What are you talking about–

JB: You really do think I'm stupid, don't you? I know what Quentin was working on. I was married to the man. I know what this thing is supposed to do. You call it the Timepiece, I call it a Wells knockoff.

SG: Come on, that's not fair. His machine went in the other direction.

JB: They went back at the end okay, just shut up! And you're going to take this machine and you're going to go back to last week and you're going to fix what you broke.

SG: I can't just take a jaunty little ride to last week.The Timepiece is barely operational. Hell, it was broken when Quentin...

JB: When Quentin what?

SG: I don't know if living tissue can make it through the process as it currently stands. And even if I did go back, I don't know how I'd stop whatever happened.

JB: Well, you were there, you tell me.

SG: That's what I'm saying! I was literally there! Who knows what would happen if two of me were in the same place at the same time? Here, look!

[[SFX: Sally tunes the TAP to Quentin's death, rolls cart]]

SG: See, this is your husband, right before he died. This machine shows you the past. He's right there, and I'm right there, working under the prototype. How the hell could I have shot him?

JB: How is that... Even if you didn't, you're responsible for fixing it.

SG: I'm sorry June, but I can't do that.

JB: Can't, or won't?

SG: Either? Both?

JB: I guess if coercion doesn't work, then threats of violence might.

[[SFX: June pulls out a gun and cocks it]]

SG: June, don't. Please, just put that away. You're going to—

JB: You're going to turn on the machine, you're going to take us back to last week, and you and I both are going to go save my husband. Or I could shoot you dead, right here, right now. It's your choice.

SG: Let's step away from the machine, put down the gun, and talk about this for a second. You don't know what you're doing.

JB: I swear to God, you send us back there right now or I will put a round in your chest!

SG: Listen–what happened is what's happened. How can you live when the past is just as uncertain as the future! I'm no more an arbiter of life and death than you–

JB: But you are! You've built this thing that promises to fix what once was broken, and you just let it sit there? Too afraid to do anything with that power, because you're afraid that one day you might regret it? You've got causality in the palm of your hand and you're flaunting your mastery over it every second that you spend with your theories and papers.

SG: Uh, I think the word you meant was flouting.

JB: WHY CAN'T YOU TAKE THIS SERIOUSLY!

[[SFX: June fires; the bullet travels back in time]]

SG: ...Oh no. Oh man, I'm gonna be sick.

JB: I just shot you. I just shot you. Where did the bullet go?

SG: Watch the monitor.

[SFX: Sally clicks the TAP]]

JB: What? But that isn't... it's not...

[[SFX: Chet enters; June collapses to the floor crying]]

JB: I can't… I can't...

CW: Sally?

SG: Seconds too late, Officer Whickman. Or right on time, depending how you look at it.

CW: What happened in here?

SG: Remember when we were talking earlier about causes and effects?

CW: How do you mean?

SG: She did it. She shot her own husband.

CW: What?

[[SFX: Chet takes the gun]]

CW: How did she even get this in here?

SG: She just wanted her husband back. And now she's why he's gone in the first place.

CW: It's hubris.

SG: No, hubris is for kings. The rest of us just get cruel irony.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

SG: [sigh] It's a common misconception that in moments of extreme stress, time slows down. It's true that your amygdala triggers a response in your hypothalamus, causing a rush of epinephrine from your adrenal gland, but that's been shown to be something of an illusion. You only experience the event as slower through the foggy haze of memory. But I watched June Barlowe's gun fire the bullet that I had spent days searching for. I vividly remember the slug spin out of the barrel as the gunpowder explosion propelled it directly at my face. And for a brief moment, I forgot about the Timepiece, about Quentin Barlowe and Polvo and 1945. And I felt fear. And as the ambient Higgs inhibitor field that the TAP used pulled the bullet away into last week, the fear dissipated and turned into a pit in my gut, left me helpless but to watch the tragedy that I thought I had been trying to prevent, not prove. But it saved my life. I just can't believe this is the first time someone has tried to kill me for being a smartass.

By all estimation, it's an event loop now. Quentin is shot by June's bullet. I invent the TAP, setting up the conditions for the grieving widow Barlowe to come in and cause her own undoing. But after all of that, there's still one thing I'm not sure about. Who fired the first bullet? I get that June makes the situation recursive, but the first bullet had no reason to be there. There was some timeline where Barlowe didn't die a week ago, and the round came from somewhere else. Somewhen else, sorry. But I don't think we'll ever know. I don't think we'll get that version. That's going to bother me forever.

[[SFX: radio tuning; Timepiece running]]

CW: Excuse me, Dr. Barlowe?

QB: Officer Whickman, how can I help you?

CW: I'm real sorry about this, Quentin, but I'm gonna need to ask you a few questions.

QB: Ask away.

CW: Well, they're a little personal.

QB: What do you mean, personal?

CW: Dr. Barlowe, what was the name of the first girl you ever kissed?

QB: June. You know June.

CW: No, I don't mean–well, you know. I'm talking first grade stuff. Just the name.

QB: I don't know what you're insinuating, but I've never had anything with anyone other than her.

CW: That's fine. I just need to ask some questions.

QB: If you want an itemized list of every girl I've ever walked home—

CW: When you were a kid, which kid did you hate the most in your school?

QB: Which kid did what?

CW: You know, the guy you hated in your class more than anything else. Hated his guts. The source of the grudge was long forgotten–he threw you under the bus, or maybe you threw him: it doesn't matter. Everything he says and does is just vile...

QB: Are you asking about my childhood feuds?

CW: Who is that for you? It's fine, everyone's got one. Just spit it out. You don't need to hesitate—

QB: Darren Little. Man, I haven't thought about how much I hate that kid in decades. He was in my class with me, what was it, third grade? He was a terrible kid. Used to try to trip me whenever I walked past his seat. Man, I really wish ill on an nine-year-old...

CW: And what school were you attending when you knew Darren? Shouldn't be too difficult. You must remember the name of your elementary school, right?

QB: Uh, let me think, the name of it was, um...

CW: I figured. When I was reassigned to Polvo, I thought it would be time to update everyone's security clearance. Then I got to you.

QB: Look, I don't know what you're getting at–

CW: Quentin Barlowe doesn't exist. I've got to hand it to you, this kind of work is special. You've got tax forms, academic transcripts, your CV was

thorough to a fault. But papers don't make the person; you didn't exist before 1943.

QB: I told you people when I got the job here–there was a fire, my childhood home–

CW: Oh yes, I made sure to check that. There wasn't a single house fire matching the description you gave anywhere in the Evanston, Illinois area. And I looked around at the schools you claim to have attended. No record of any Quentin Barlowes. I even tracked every Barlowe and every Quentin I could find, just to make sure. You underestimated my thoroughness. You underestimated our thoroughness. Was the wife a plant, too?

QB: No, June is real! Whickman, you need to listen to me very carefully. This isn't what it looks like.

CW: It looks to me like you're a spy.

[[SFX: Chet cocks his sidearm]]

QB: Hey, hey, no need to get crazy about this, okay?

CW: Who are you with? The Japs? The Krauts? Or have the Russians turned on us already?

QB: I'm not with any of them! I'm with you! Officer Whickman, please, you have to believe me! Okay, I lied to you about my past. About where I'm from. But I swear to God and Jesus and all the nonsense upstairs that I am not working for anybody else. I am an ODAR man, through and through. I'm on your side!

CW: I... I believe you.

QB: ...You do? Really?

CW: You sound sincere. I've got a sense for these things.

QB: Oh, thank you! Thank you!

CW: But I've also got my orders.

[[SFX: Chet fires two shots; one hits Quentin, one travels in time; Quentin groans, falls to the ground]]

CW: One out of two rounds? At this range? Getting sloppy, Chet.

[[SFX: tape recorder stops]]

ars PARADOXICA is created by Daniel Manning and Mischa Stanton.
Episode 04: Bullet features –

Kristen DiMercurio (Sally Grissom)
Reyn Beeler (Chet Whickman)
Robin Gabrielli (Anthony Partridge)
Katie Speed (Esther Roberts)
Lee Satterwhite (Quentin Barlowe)
Hannah Trobaugh (June Barlowe)
Geoff Pictor (additional voices)
with special thanks to Isabel Atkinson

Original music by Mischa Stanton.
ars PARADOXICA is brought to you by the Internet: We're really sorry, Blockbuster.

17 11 | 04 14 | 18 11 10 03 | 20 18 11 24 02 08 08 19 | 19 17 06 11
WEATHER: windy

05: Midnight

WRITTEN BY DANIEL MANNING
DIRECTED & SOUND DESIGN BY MISCHA STANTON

[[SFX: tape recorder starts; a muffled crowd]]

SALLY GRISSOM (SG): *(out of breath)* Okay... Diary... Sally Grissom... December 21, 1945... Time is, uh, 12:26? That can't be right. I need to reset my watch. I guess that it's about quarter, half past nine? I'm in the maintenance room. There was a backup power supply here but it hasn't been recharged in I don't know how many weeks, so the Timepiece could only hurl me back a few hours. Unfortunately, not until after everything was in boxes. The Timepiece doesn't move your position relative to Earth, so now I'm locked in a broom closet. Everyone else is at the Christmas party. They don't know that they've been fired yet. And they definitely don't know that the town is going to burn to the ground in about two hours. And I'm supposed to be trying to fix it by now but I'm stuck in this stupid closet!

As long as I'm here, I might as well go through the catastrophe we're trying to avoid. It started at the party, a couple hours ago... Or, maybe not? Victor Lambert was explaining to me, Project Rainbow's supposed to bend light...

[[SFX: radio tuning; party crowd, Christmas music]]

VICTOR LAMBERT (VL): ...Rainbow's supposed to bend light, you know? We thought, if you could bend the light that goes around the ship, you would make it disappear from view, right? But after the Eldridge, after Philadelphia... hey, we had to give up the dream. So maybe we couldn't make a ship invisible, but we still had all this really good research. So we figured, what if we bent the light into a container, you know, take for ourselves? Rainbow took one step back and two steps to the side. We worked our original designs into a system to harness the power of the sun. But Ivan and I bit off more than we could chew, trying to capture and store every photon in a given area. The challenge wasn't taking in all that energy, you see. It's holding onto it until you need it. People need their electricity all day, and studies have proven that solar energy collection rates drop to zero at night.

JACK WYATT (JW): Smart aleck.

SG: Wyatt, he's not wrong.

VL: So we put in this big loop of wires that go around town. A massive network of copper. Remember a couple of years ago, there was that week when everything tasted like pennies? We were installing it.

JW: And you didn't feel like you had to tell us?

VL: Are you unhappy with your free, unlimited electricity?

JW: Well... I guess not...

VL: The network is maintained by two solar collectors, one at either end of town. Since we installed the system I've been at one of them, while Ivan manages the other. Each one takes in sunlight during the day, and stores it as electrical charge in these massive cells. At night, the cells slowly discharge and trickle into your homes. And you didn't even see it happen.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

SG: Of course, if he had known that Ivan Maraczek would storm away from his station the minute everyone lost their jobs... That Ivan wouldn't be around to do anything when an imbalance in the system caused the stored energy to build to critical levels... He'd probably have said all that with a little more urgency and a little less... Exposition.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

HANK CORNISH (HC): Excuse me everyone. Can I have your attention please?

ANTHONY PARTRIDGE (AP): Settle down, settle down everyone.

[[SFX: music cuts out]]

HC: Thank you. Hello, sorry to interrupt the party everyone, my plane encountered a spot of bad weather headed this way. My name is Agent Hank Cornish, I'm with the Central Intelligence Group. I'm here to thank you, on behalf of the President and the American people, for all the work you've done here in Polvo these past few years. The men and women in this room have made innumerable strides for science and technology, and you all personally helped keep America safe. So I want to thank you.

[[SFX: Hank claps; the crowd confusedly applauds]]

HC: Yes thank you, thank you. And it is on that high note that we'll be shutting down operations of the Office of Developed Anomalous Resources effective immediately, and starting January 1st the assets here will be absorbed into the Central Intelligence Group.

[[SFX: distressed crowd]]

HELEN PARTRIDGE (HP): Wait a minute... What's going to happen to the town?

HC: The State Department has set aside some funds for severance and relocation costs. Now you're all very important to us and we value all of the work you've done, so we've got you taken care of. Now the town itself and what you all found in it when you moved here are property of the United

States government and will be seized, as well as any active project resources.

VL: Did he say project resources—

HC: I'm sorry, I really didn't mean to take up a ton of your time. Have a great party everybody, merry Christmas.

[[SFX: Hank leaves]]

VL: What is that supposed to mean?

AP: It means that we're done.

ESTHER ROBERTS (ER): So, that's it? We're all fired?

AP: It means there's no one to fire us.

JW: Well, what are we supposed to do?

AP: Start looking for new positions. I'm sure you can get a good reference from whoever we're supposed to be, officially.

VL: And that's just it?

AP: That's it. We're dead in the water.

JW: ...I don't know about you all, but I came here for a Christmas party. I have resolved to wait until this glass is empty to think about whatever's next.

[[SFX: crowd agrees]]

AP: I have been meaning to drink a bottle of absinthe I received a year ago.

ER: But absinthe is illegal.

AP: Not in Spain. A colleague snuck it across the Atlantic for me.

ER: How many of your colleagues moonlight as booze smugglers from war-torn Europe?

AP: Esther, there was a time when all of us were moonlighting as booze smugglers from war- torn Europe! But times change.

HP: Oh please. Esther, he bought it in Canada. Smuggled it out of war-torn Manitoba. It's moonshine with green food coloring.

ER: That does sound suitably depressing.

AP: Absinthe is a liquor best paired with sorrow.

VL: Who said that?

AP: Nathaniel Hawthorne, I believe.

ER: Do you? Do you think Hawthorne said that?

AP: No idea. Never read Hawthorne. But I'd like to think he said it.

[[SFX: tape fast-forward]]

JW: *(very drunk)* Do we drink to forget, or do we remember so we have something we can lose when we drink?

AP: *(also fairly drunk)* You're already drunk.

JW: Am I! I should live it up now that I'm the newest face in the bread line.

SG: Do me a favor, Hooverville, go get another bottle from the supply closet.

JW: Yes captain! Away!

[[SFX: thunder]]

SG: Wow, it's getting pretty bad out there.

HP: All the better to drown our sorrows.

SG: So where will you go?

HP: I'm not sure. Someplace green, I think. I'm done with the flat brown sand. I'd like to live somewhere with hills, covered in trees. And I think it'd be good for us to settle down. Living here is so... Stressful. I think a calm little life is just the ticket for us now.

SG: Sounds nice.

HP: But they said... "All resources." Has anyone mentioned what that means for you?

SG: Not yet. But I've put in two years here, behaved for the most part. I think I can make them see reason.

HP: And what if you can't?

SG: Then fuck 'em.

HP: Oh, well... Ok! Cheers to that!

[[SFX: glasses clink]]

VL: Me, I imagine I'll take the work I've done here and continue. Things I've done here will change the world! I'll sell the patents, make a lot of money, and just live a little bit easier.

SG: Don't be too sure—

JW: Dr. Grissom I found this bottle, is that ok?

SG: Excellent work my friend!

HP: Do you want me to put that on the drinks table for you?

SG: Why? This ones for me.

[[SFX: bottle sloshes, Sally drinks; thunder]]

SG: There it is again. Wow. That's some heavy thunder.

HP: I wouldn't worry.

JW: Yeah, look, don't worry! We're just out of a job, can't tell anyone what we've been doing, tossed back out into the world like a mackerel caught in a tuna net–

HP: Okay Jack, I think maybe you've had enough... I'm gonna set him down somewhere, and try to find a restroom. Excuse me.

[[SFX: Helen leads Jack away]]

SG: Huh. Where would I go... That is if they let me go...

[[SFX: thunder; power goes out]]

SG: And on three... Hey Lambert, you're the power guy, any ideas?

VL: I don't know, I should be off for the... Ivan! Christ, he must be devastated...

SG: What do you mean?

VL: Well... He and I have known each other for years. I brought him into Polvo myself, but... He has a bad habit of getting run out of any place he went. Polvo was sort of a last chance to get it right. And now...

[[SFX: sci-fi electrical explosion]]

VL: That can't be good.

SG: What was that?

VL: My best guess is, something at Ivan's station failed and there's a dangerous electricity buildup that's causing the Rainbow generator to overload.

SG: Pretty specific guess.

VL: What can I say? I made the system, I'm pretty familiar with how it operates.

[[SFX: emergency siren]]

VL: And there it is. Right on time.

JW: Oh God, we're going to die here. I can see it. I've seen it…. [cries]

AP: We're not going to die here, keep your boots on.

SG: Lambert, what's the timeline here?

VL: Not long. About thirty minutes until critical, another hour or so until the Eldridge Effect tears the town apart.

SG: The Eldridge Effect?

VL: It was before you got here. The Philadelphia Experiment went to pot after the Rainbow generator stopped bending light, but the fabric of spacetime itself. Luckily, it only ran for a second, but... Sally, hey Sally where are you going?

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

SG: So I ran outside, to see what had really happened. There was a strange glow coming from the very edge of town, where Lambert had said the station was. If the effect like the one that brought me here ever occurred again, it could ruin everything I created. Hell, it might even ruin my first jump from 20[redacted], and I'll have to deal with another one of me sitting among the ruins of the base. I'm not sure if I could handle another one of me around. I mean, different from now, since I'm the one... Never mind.

I ran back into the labs and grabbed the Timepiece. I figured, if I could go back and stop the explosion before whatever reaction hit critical mass it would all be over. But I admit… I hesitated. When I was alone with it, I don't know, I just felt this urge to... Run. Just pack up everything, the Timepiece, all my notes, and get as far away as I could. But as I took the tarp off the device, I heard the voice of June Barlowe. In front of the machine, gun pointed at my head.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

JUNE BARLOWE: You've built this thing that promises to fix what once was broken, and you just let it sit there? Too afraid to do anything with that power, because you're afraid that one day you might regret it?

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

SG: I don't know if it was the drink or the adrenaline, but I looked at Timepiece and I saw, I knew that I could, in fact, save everyone. If not everyone, then at least my friends in Polvo. So I set it down, began to start it up... and remembered that the power in the lab was dead. Obviously. Fortunately there was this little backup supply. I grabbed that and came to this closet, to make sure no one would be able to see me when I arrived in the past... That's pretty much where you came in.

I want to believe that just some kind of miracle will get me out of here. That, or I do the difficult thing and pound on the walls until someone probably talking to me right now can—

[[SFX: door opens, party sounds]]

JW: Dr. Grissom?

SG: Wyatt! Oh good.

JW: Did you use the Timepiece?

SG: How... why do you think that?

JW: Well, you're standing in a closet that was locked from the outside, you're soaking wet and it isn't raining outside, and also we built a time machine and I might be drunk but I'm not an idiot.

[[SFX: thunder]]

SG: Oh! I remember that thunder! What time is it?

JW: Don't you have a wa- oh, right. It's 9:38.

SG: Only about two and a half hours...

JW: You left just after midnight?

SG: Twelve on the dial, actually. I didn't exactly plan on it, but it sure does makes the math easy.

JW: You didn't plan this? So when you asked me to go get a bottle, you didn't plan on me finding you?

SG: Wait, when did I... The bottle! Hah! I am a genius! Past Sally for the win!

[[SFX: Sally gives herself a high five]]

JW: Did you just give yourself, like a high five?

SG: A girl's got to stay positive when the town's about to blow up OH RIGHT I forgot to tell you the town is about to blow up!

JW: Why did you not lead with that!

SG: Listen, you need to help me with this. The town's in danger, and we have a time limit and some clear goals, so you've got to walk yourself out of your green moonshine stupor and get with me here!

JW: Alright, okay, I've got it, I'm on it. What do you need from me?

SG: Let me think. Is Lambert still at the party?

JW: As far as I know, he's in there with everyone. And you! We all just found out we were fired... Wait that happened to you too right?

SG: Unfortunately.

JW: Any idea why?

SG: No! I'm from like, three hours ahead of you. Come on man, focus. One of the Rainbow solar collectors is going to overload and it's going to set off a chain reaction to-

JW: Destroy the town?

SG: That's the one. Oh, and it'll ruin the Timepiece, and possibly tear spacetime a new one.

JW: The stakes are pretty high, huh?

SG: C'est la vie. So you need to help me get out of the building, then warn Lambert. I'll try to get to the other station to see if I can stop this whole thing from blowing its lid. Sound good?

JW: Can I just ask-wha, why are we even saving this town? I don't even like it. I don't even work here anymore!

SG: You could try mounting a full-scale evacuation of Polvo in half an hour. Or maybe you'd just rather let thousands of people die.

JW: Yeah, ok fine, so we're going to fix the broken science thing?

SG: Or die trying.

JW: Not a great set of choices.

SG: Not really, no.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

SG: This is the tricky part. If anyone sees us, we'll have to–

HP: Oh, Jack, there you are! And... Hello Sally.

SG: Helen, so great to... see you.

HP: I just left you in the other room, I swear...

[[SFX: static distortion]]

SG: No, I... went to the bathroom.

HP: Aren't the restrooms in the other direction?

SG: There's uh... a mostly unused one that way. I like the privacy.

HP: And you have the handsome Jack Wyatt to accompany you?

JW: I ran into her coming back... Just went to find a–

HP: [laughs] Don't worry, you're not breaking any laws walking down a hallway together. I'm going to go look for Sally's mythical private restroom. I hope it's as nice as you say it is. Most ladies' restrooms in this place are an afterthought...

SG: It's not really anything to—

HP: Well, enjoy your time anyway! Have fun tonight. This may be your last chance... but I think you two already figured that out.

[[SFX: Helen leaves]]

SG: That was weird.

JW: A secret bathroom tryst?

SG: I just want to get out of here. Grab Lambert and tell him that the power station needs attention. When you're out of the party, brief him on the rest. I'm going to make my way to Maraczek's station and see what I can do from that end.

JW: And you're taking Timepiece with you?

SG: I might need it again. Besides, you can't just leave two time machines around in the same place. Someone might get ideas to make duplicates.

[[SFX: thunder]]

SG: Come on.

[[SFX: radio tuning; Sally driving through rain]]

SG: I'm on my way to Rainbow-A, the station where Maraczek works... so he and Lambert, they were researchers, and now they're, what, glorified caretakers? Maybe getting out of the military industrial complex now is a good idea. I'd be free of hassles like this. I could disappear tomorrow. I could vanish. I'm in a time where it's easy to fake a new identity. Sally Grissom no more. I could be–WHAA

[[SFX: thunder, lightning strikes the station]]

SG: Well, at least I know what's going to cause Rainbow-A to fail. One of the high antenna on the station just got hit by lightning. It's 10:04, for the record. If this thing's collecting energy, it probably just got more than it could handle in one punch. Lambert said something about a release lever, one that would shut off the entire station and discharge any excess power into the ground. But it might explode by the time I'm in there. It's getting pretty late. So if you're listening to this, I'm dead. Or maybe I'm alive and you're just listening to this recording. Either way, see you on the other side.

[[SFX: radio tuning; inside the station. It's about to explode.]]

SG: Hello? Ivan, anybody home? [nope] Alright, what am I doing here? It sounds like a dying animal. At least it's being used for something noble, in theory. Noble and deadly. Like Argon. The failsafe controls should be right over... here! I've got about... oh, half an hour. Plenty of time. You got this, Sally.

[[SFX: Sally flips the switch, and the energy dissipates without exploding]]

SG: Excellent... Day saved! Cool! Huh... They're probably going to box this stuff up in the morning. Maybe I can just sneak a look...

[[SFX: tape fast-forward]]

SG: —azing! It would absolutely crush solar tech from my time. I wonder why this never got developed, if I was ODAR I'd put this on the market as soon as possible. My time should have had this. I wonder what hap—WHOA!

[[SFX: explosion; radio tuning]]

SG: It's okay, it's okay! Calm down, I'm here to help!

IVAN MARACZEK (IM): You! Where did you! How did you--

SG: Shh, shh shh shh. Catch your breath, let me talk. You're Ivan Maraczek, right?

IM: ...Mm-hmm

SG: Alright, you're who I've been looking for. Maraczek, what time is it?

IM: Quarter after nine. You're wearing a watch--

SG: Okay, Ivan, in about fifty minutes, this building is going to get struck by lightning.

IM: How could you possibly know--

SG: This building is going to get struck by lightning, and I'm going to need you to stay here.

IM: That sounds like it might be dangerous.

SG: Stay with me, Maraczek. Stand just outside if you really want. But you need to stay here for when things go bottoms-up. No matter what happens. No matter if you lose your job.

IM: I'm going to lose my job?

SG: What? No! Well… yes. Whoops. Sorry I ruined the surprise. By like, fifteen minutes.

IM: I've seen you in Polvo, but I don't know why you're here. How do you know all this? What are you doing here?

SG: I'd rather not have to explain all of this again, but since you're doing me a favor and I can spare a minute, let me catch you up. It all started when—

[[SFX: tape fast-foward]]

SG:—and then there was this explosion outside, and I ran out there, and I could see the fire clear across town. I jumped in my car and drove there as fast as I could, but Rainbow-B burned to the ground. I think... I think Wyatt and Lambert were in there.

IM: What? Victor? No! I've known him the better part of a decade... He pulled me out of... No, you're wrong, that can't be true.

SG: It isn't. Not if I can do anything about it.

IM: I have to get to him. I have to save him.

SG: You have to stay right here. If you leave, then Rainbow-A is screwed too. You have to be here when lightning strikes the station, or we're all doomed, et cetera. I'm gonna fix this.

IM: Where are you going to go?

SG: Ever heard the phrase "where there's smoke there's fire?" I'm gonna go beat the smoke to the punch.

IM: No I've never heard this phrase! What are you talking about?

[[SFX: radio tuning; broken Rainbow generator]]

SG: Lambert! Lambert— what the hell happened here?

[[SFX: Victor destroying the machine with a pipe]]

VL: I'm not going to let them get away with this anymore!

SG: What are you doing? What happened to Wyatt?

VL: He got in the way.

SG: You did this to him?

VL: ODAR's been in my head long enough, I'm done with this town and everyone in it.

SG: Wyatt—Jack can you hear me? I think he's really hurt!

VL: If I can't leave with the fruits of my labor, then no one can!

SG: What did he say to you?

[[SFX: radio tuning; Jack and Victor enter]]

JW: All Sally needs is for us to make sure nothing awful happens over here.

VL: Well, in that case, I should pick up as many of my old patents I can find before I get out of here.

JW: You know they're never going to let you keep those, right?

VL: The hell they will. I had my nose on the grindstone for years at this place. I'm gonna take my plans and I'm going somewhere they'll appreciate it. General Electric, I'm thinking.

JW: Victor, that's not how ODAR works, and you know it. They're shutting down this town, and everything in it. They'll bury your [illegible]patents, and they'll bury you. You think Donovan won't notice when GE just happens to independently invent something that only exists in a triple dog dare super-secret science base? They'll be on you before you can say "let there be light."

VL: No, I can fight it, I can—

JW: So you're gonna fight the part of the US government that can hire thousands of people, ship them all to the desert, keep it a secret for four years and fire them without a word? That's who you're gonna fight?

VL: You're right. There's no way they'll let me keep it...

[[SFX: Victor picks up Chekov's pipe]]

VL: Well... For every action, there’s an equal and opposite reaction...

JW: You’re just gonna smash it? No! that's not how that works! You can't just-

[[SFX: Victor swings at the machine, catching Jack’s skull on the backswing; radio tuning]]

VL: This machine is my greatest achievement, and I won't have it shipped off to some dusty warehouse until Uncle Sam needs it for another war!

SG: It's not like that! Think of all the good this thing can do! What it would do if it got outside these walls?

VL: Rainbow will never do good outside these walls! It'll never get out outside these walls.

SG: But you're getting out! You're being granted a reprieve from this! Some of us should be so lucky.

VL: There's nothing out there for me. ODAR has made sure of that. Oh, sure, they'll set me up as some tenured professor at some Tom, Dick, and Harry university. But they'll make sure and see to it that I'm not involved in anything of note... ever again. This is it. This machine is my contributions to science, and it'll disappear, without so much as my name on it.

SG: Listen, we need to get Wyatt to a doctor. He's unconscious and you really aren't supposed to let that happen.

VL: Let him bleed out on the floor, for all I care. Get him to the hospital if you must. I'm going to tear every last screw and bolt out of this machine, and then I'm going to burn all the plans.

SG: You're going to kill everyone here and yourself.

VL: Let it happen! I've got nothing left to stay for.

[[SFX: Sally punches Victor; they fight; Victor swings, misses; Sally jumps onto Victor’s back and chokes him out; radio tuning]]

BILL DONOVAN (BD): This was good work you did tonight, Sally. I'm proud that you got the Timepiece up and running in a pinch, even though you'll never hear me say that again and I have heard nothing about some sort of alleged unauthorized use of ODAR materials by a former employee.

SG: I couldn't possibly comment on something like that. It sounds positively treasonous.

BD: I'll have you know that I'm not letting the Timepiece die. I'm working on something, and there is a spot for you there, should you be interested. But otherwise you're free to leave, as much as anyone in your position could be.

You have been locked away in a tower too long. Agent Cornish asked me to escort you to him. He's here to discuss your options.

SG: I'll be honest, after this week, I'm not sure if I want my job back. Or a new job. And not from you, to be a little rude. You hit the nail on the head with the tower metaphor. Wyatt's still recovering. This place destroys people.

BD: It does, but your best chance of doing something truly amazing is here. What else is out there for you?

SG: I can figure out my own path. And I don't want anyone named Agent telling me what I can and can't do.

BD: It would be good to hear what he has to say. Agent Cornish is more interesting than you think.

[[SFX: door opens]]

ANOTHER SALLY GRISSOM: Well I appreciate you offer, and I'll have to—

HANK CORNISH (HC): Ah, there you are. We've been waiting.

SG/SG: Is that—aaagh...

[[SFX: static distortion]]

BD: Sally! Sally!

HC: Dr. Grissom, are you all right?

[[SFX: static distortion; radio tuning; Jingle Bells on the radio]]

SG: unggh...

ER: Sally! Er, Doctor Grissom! You're awake.

[[SFX: radio turns off]]

SG: What time is it, I need to get back to the lab.

ER: No, it's over. You stopped Victor. The power stations are fine, I just left Jack is a couple of rooms down, he looks pretty shaken...

SG: What are you talking about?

ER: You know, when you drove like a madwoman putting out fires trying to stop Victor from destroying the town? It was like you were in eight places at once. Very impressive.

SG: I didn't... When did I do that?

ER: Sally, honey, what day is it today?

SG: It's, ahhh... My head. It’s Friday, right?

ER: It's Monday. Christmas Eve. You've been out cold ever since you saved the town, the night of the party.

SG: I saved the town?

ER: You must have lost the memory from fatigue and stress. But you saved us, even though we all got fired.

SG: Oh my god, I'm so sorry. Let me talk to Donovan, I can work something out—

ER: Sally, Sally take it easy! It’s okay. It’s not anything you did. They’re shutting down the town. But it'll be okay! Donovan is moving our team elsewhere. Colorado, I think. You, me, Jack, I think they even got Doctor Partridge, too. We’ll all be okay.

SG: I saved the town and my job, and I don't even have the common courtesy to remember it? Figures.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

HC: She's awake.

BD: And how is she?

HC: Within expected parameters. Lost the entirety of the last two days, lucky for us. The one that made it to Lambert was getting... defiant. The one made it to Maraczek seemed to be going in the same direction.

BD: Well, you'd think. Which one did you keep?

HC: Does it matter? There’s only one Sally Grissom. But take a look at her autopsy report. Brain lesions, nerve damage... Her symptoms look just like yours.

BD: I don't have all the time in the world. Figure it out.

[[SFX: tape recorder stops]]

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ars PARADOXICA is created by Daniel Manning and Mischa Stanton.
Episode 05: Midnight features –

Kristen DiMercurio (Sally Grissom)
Rob Slotnick (Bill Donovan)
Robin Gabrielli (Anthony Partridge)
Susanna Kavee (Helen Partridge)
Katie Speed (Esther Roberts)
Zach Ehrlich (Jack Wyatt)
Dan Anderson (Hank Cornish)
Eric Rafael Ibarra (Victor Lambert)
Julian Mundy (Ivan Maraczek)
Hannah Trobaugh (June Barlowe)
with special thanks to Isabel Atkinson

Original music by Mischa Stanton.
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WEATHER: thunderstorms

06: Exile

WRITTEN BY DANIEL MANNING
DIRECTED & SOUND DESIGN BY MISCHA STANTON

[[SFX: tape recorder starts; driving in a truck]]

BILL DONOVAN (BD): Chet, how are we doing on time?

CHET WHICKMAN (CW): About forty-five minutes out.

JACK WYATT (JW): So can you please tell us where in God's name we're actually going? What is this mystery site you're taking us to?

SALLY GRISSOM (SG): I still haven't ruled out "military prison." Or "execution site."

CW: To be perfectly honest with you Dr. Grissom, if we were going to make you all disappear, we wouldn't have driven you halfway to Canada to do it. The desert's plenty empty.

ESTHER ROBERTS (ER): Good to know how few qualms you have about killing us...

BD: Why would we have been taking you all to prison?

ER: Because... Because we got the town shut down. It was our fault all the money and resources, wasted. And now we're traitors.

SG: We're loose ends.

JW: Or both.

BD: Settle down, everybody. We're bringing you to the town of Point-of-Exile, Colorado.

ANTHONY PARTRIDGE (AP): Come on Bill, that sounds made up.

BD: Chet?

CW: Uh… Founded 1917, elevation 7742 feet. That's the 84th highest city in the continental US.

ER: It's like having an encyclopedia.

CW: I don't know what you want from me. They put it in the pamphlet.

BD: The four of you were all that will be left of the Office of Developed Anomalous Resources. You four, Chet, and myself.

SG: And the four jeeps full of time machine behind us.

CW: And Mrs. Partridge.

HP: Most days I'm just along for the ride...

BD: I want you four to know, I believe in the work you're doing. I can't tell you how much I believe in the work you're doing. But it's been decided that the United States needs a coordinated intelligence service. Not this piecemeal farce we've been doing up until now.

ER: What does that have to do with us?

SG: Hah. Hah-hah. Ahahaha. HAAAHahahaahaha. No.

ER: What?

SG: Donovan thinks the Timepiece is going to give him a leg up in the race to become the next great US intelligence agency. But he's wrong. The Timepiece only barely works, and by itself it's not nearly as useful as he thinks it is.

BD: You're right, it's not. That's why you're not working for Central Intelligence.

SG: Then what are we doing here?

BD: If I promise to keep it short, will you stop derailing me?

SG: I will try my hardest, but that is asking a lot of me.

BD: You're not working for an agency. You will be working for me, directly.

HP: So they're not even working for the government?

CW: That's what it'll say on the pay stub. But it won't exactly be true.

BD: Point-of-Exile has been designated as a Central Intelligence outpost, but your project will not officially be a part of it. Officially, you were in the wind. [cough] Your Strategic Services contracts have expired, ODAR was no more. [coughs]

JW: This doesn't exactly seem like it's above-board...

SG: You okay, buddy?

BD: I'll be fine. I've managed to secure you the same access to resources you had in Polvo. And you'll have the same run of the place, at least for the first

year or so. However long it takes the government to cut through the red tape. The pieces will fit themselves around you, and no one has known you're not supposed to be there in the first place.

ER: Do you really think it's worth all this?

BD: You don't seem to understand. The work you all are doing, the machine you invented... It has been the single greatest human achievement since the light bulb. Since the printing press. Since gunpowder, and steel, and the wheel. Since man discovered fire. What you are making has limitless potential to change the world. I will see... I've seen that, clear as day. And I couldn't forgive myself for letting you all give it up because of a couple of minor setbacks.

JW: Minor setbacks?! A man died!

BD: I'm sorry, I misspoke. The setbacks were substantial. But where would the world be if Thomas Edison had given up every time he failed?

AP: Bill, that was a lovely speech, but what about me? What am I doing here?

BD: The Predictive Mechanics project is being integrated into Timepiece research. Anthony, you'll be part of Sally's team.

HP: But Anthony was your director of project development!

BD: And now, he isn't.

HP: And you just want to throw that all away?

AP: Thanks, Helen, really, but I don't need you sticking your nose in like this...

HP: Sticking my nose in?! How can you let him do this?

AP: We'll talk about this later.

SG: But Donovan, why are you doing this? What do you get out of keeping Timepiece around, and as a secret? We give you "the greatest achievement since the light bulb" to use as you please, so you can use time travel spycraft to make a mockery of due process? No, I won't have any part of this.

BD: Listen. I know what you must think of me. A big man with a briefcase full of secrets and hidden agendas. The truth is that when Polvo was shut down I lost more than any of you. Banished to a tiny mountain town, stripped of everything I had. [cough] I'm calling in the last few favors I had to convince them to keep me on, and to give me enough resources to keep your project running. Why? Because I will believe the work you're doing was... will change the world for the better. The end of the greatest war we've ever seen, and on the verge of something even bigger. I think the world needs us. And I think

that if you didn't already believe me, you wouldn't have come along to begin with.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

SG: Diary of Sally Grissom, February 23rd, 1946. So I've been here a couple weeks... what kind of name is Point-of-Exile, anyway? I'm reading between the lines here, but the town's welcome pamphlet implies that a bunch of miners got salty about some labor dispute, drunkenly decided to vacate whatever hole in the ground they were in, and when they sobered up they set up shop in the middle of the forest. It was their exile. Their place of ex-- Point. Point of Exile. I was trying to say point of exile. Because, you know, it's the town's... you know what? Never mind. I don't know why I'm explaining this to my diary.

Maybe the air is getting to me. It's much thinner than the air in New Mexico, dense as it was with desert dust. Up here, it's clearer. I feel... I dunno. Refreshed. Of course, that could just be generalized hypoxia setting in. We'll see.

I think I'm the only one in our formerly-merry band of scientists who's actually enjoying the new digs. Partridge isn't appreciating what's essentially a demotion, and after what happened at Christmas Wyatt's heart just doesn't seem in it as much. I wouldn't know, my head's still a bit fuzzy about the whole time. I guess a brush with the Great Nothingness makes secret government super-science seem lacking. Roberts has been running triple-duty just to keep up with the gaps they leave. Poor girl. She desperately needs some time off, but I'm not sure we have any to spare.

[[SFX: radio tuning; Ester and Jack playing cards]]

ER: I don't think it works that way.

JW: Yeah, but you're suggesting we just roll over and do what the Director says.

ER: I'm saying we do what's best for the project.

JW: When does what's best for the project interfere with what's best for us?

ER: The four of us are the only people in the entire world who know enough to keep the Timepiece. We can't just abandon it right when it's getting a second chance.

JW: Or, we can just let it go down on life support. We can get real jobs, that pay money! Even if either of us failed in the private sector any halfway decent university would be so glad to have us.

ER: There isn't a place like this anywhere else. This is a unique opportunity. We're developing an entirely new discipline of physics. What kind of fat paycheck is worth that?

JW: Well, considering that we can't even talk about our new discipline of physics, any credit will probably go to Dr. Grissom, or worse, Bill Donovan.

ER: Is that what you care about? Credit?

JW: On our pay grade, you damn betcha.

ER: You're acting like a child.

JW: You weren't there. You didn't have your head smashed in by an over-worked, under-paid, hyper-stressed pipe-wielding lunatic.

ER: You're right. I wasn't there. But I'm here now. And I'm staying, and I'm going to keep doing my job. If you want to give up, that's your right. But that means it's all on me. And that means I don't have time for your pity party.

[[SFX: Esther throws her cards, stands up from the table]]

ER: We're done here.

[[SFX: Esther exits, bumping the record player on the way out; radio tuning]]

SG: Unlike them, I'm used to being an outsider by now. Actually it's a lot better this time around. The people of Point-of-Exile are warm, welcoming folk. It turns out that Sally Grissom is a halfway-decent casual-acquaintance-maker when she's not upending jobs because she rode into 1943 on a hoverboard. Everything is changing in America. People are optimistic about what's next. The postwar enthusiasm here is palpable. Everyone is like that sailor on V-Day, only... Less gross. To the people in P-of-E, I'm just the delightful new girl in town who does something vague with rocks and maps in that little Department of the Interior field office. Of course, I really work for the Department of Technically Not Even America designing impressively convoluted systems for intelligence gathering, but does anybody really know what their neighbors do while they're at work?

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

HP: You told me this was a transfer, a promotion! And now I find out that not only are you not working for the Army anymore, but now you're another one of Sally's worker bees? Are you being serious?

AP: Helen, you heard the Director. He risked his neck just to get us all out here. He wouldn't have done that if he didn't need my expertise on the project. They need me here.

HP: I need you here! We left Massachusetts for you. I put everything on hold for you. You told me about your secret project, that you had to go help end the war. And you did it! But now we've fought the last war and it's time for the soldiers to come home.

AP: I'm not fighting, Helen. I'm not fighting wars. I'm trying to end them. Before they can ever start.

HP: Do you really believe that you're going to end all war? Do you think you're smarter than all the great and terrible men through history who've claimed to do just that?

AP: I have more capacity to do it than any of those men ever did!

HP: Do you? Or are you just falling into the same trap they did? Caesar, Alexander, Napoleon. The emperor and the Kaiser and the Fuhrer. They all thought they were going to bring peace to the world. And they fought and they fought, and in the end millions died and people are still fighting. Do you really think you're so different, just because you have better tools? I saw that bomb, Anthony. And that's just the first. Now the world has seen it too, and do you think they're running away, tail between their legs? No. Now all that's changed is that everyone wants one of their own.

AP: Listen, Helen... I love you.

HP: I love you too.

AP: And I need to do this. And I need you here with me.

HP: I worry about you, Anthony. All the time. All this pressure you put on yourself... What are we even doing here, in the middle of nowhere, with you doing God knows what, and me sitting around all day wishing that for once, we can just be a normal couple who live in a normal town and have normal lives.

AP: This is a normal town! A little remote, but... Look, it's not like it was. You don't need to be looking over your shoulder wondering if you've said too much. Well--you still can't tell anybody what I do, but that has always been true. We can be real people here, Helen. We can have a life. Things in New Mexico weren't perfect, but we can take another shot at it here. I want to do this with you, Helen. You're the only woman I've ever loved.

HP: Our little secret...

AP: Our little secret.

HP: What's your cover story now?

AP: Department of the Interior. If anyone asks, tell them it's something to do with radar and weather detection.

HP: Do you really think we can make this work? Look into my eyes and tell me truly.

AP: I can't predict the future, but I think we can. I know we can. We're strong.

HP: Isn't your job supposed to be predicting the future?

AP: Alright, fair point. I can predict the future. And I predict that we're going to do pretty well.

HP: Our supper is getting cold.

AP: I suppose it is.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

SG: I've almost spent three full years in the nineteen forties, and I've mostly bridged the culture gap. I can keep up with their keen jive, and even though my Borat impression doesn't really play with them, it never really played in 20[redacted]either, so maybe that just wasn't meant to be. I've replaced the Internet with radio and--gasp--real books from a library. TV still has a few more years to get mainstream enough to be accessible. A slide rule and a pad of paper aren't quite MATLAB. What I really miss are the little conveniences. Email. GPS. Pizza at your door in thirty minutes or less. The things that won't revolutionize your life, but might make your day a little brighter. But it's not like those things don't exist in their component parts. Well, GPS satellites aren't in the sky yet, but... pizza exists. And until the satellites get up there, I think I can re-make a little bit of the 21st Century for myself.

The first step in that direction is that I'm re-teaching myself electronics. I ended up building this recording device that I realized was basically... well, it was just a circuit that I could strap onto a recorder that would essentially be a telephone answering machine. I mean, I'm not exactly sure when those were invented but they probably exist somewhere. I just built one out of things I have ready access to. I'm definitely a few years ahead of a commercial offering of this technology, but I could make one for myself, and probably make a few more to give them to friends or whatever. Something that's not going to redefine my work day, just now I can occasionally redirect missed phone calls. Of course, it's going to be pulling teeth trying to get people to figure out how to use it. I can't believe I'm going to have to teach technology to people born in the Twenties twice.

[[SFX: radio tuning; beep]]

SG: *(on answering machine)* You've reached Dr. Sally Grissom's voice-o-matic telephone message recording machine. I'm not home right now, but this device can record a short message that I'll be able to listen to later. In a few moments, I'll stop talking, and then there will be a click. After the click, leave your message.

[[SFX: recording runs to the end]]

SG: *(speeding up)* Then when you're done, hang up. I'll get back to you as soon as I can. I know this is complicated, and I really appreciate your cooperation. Thanks, have a nice day!

[[SFX: beep; radio tuning]]

SG: I think my first pass at an outgoing message might have filled up an entire spool of wire. There's a lot to unpack in there. But people aren't idiots, they can figure it out. I can't have texting, but I won't have to worry that my phone is ringing, somewhere. You know. For all those people that call me... I'm sure it'll come in handy one of these days. I'll start working on texting next week.

It's just a distraction though. I've been avoiding the office a little bit. I received a report from Roberts and Wyatt on a new experiment for the Timepiece, testing the viability of positive-time motion... It was just Roberts who came up with the theory. The paper has both of their names on it, and she hasn't said a word to me about it yet, but I've seen them at their desks. There used to be a camaraderie between the three of us. You know, we joked, we smiled, we laughed while we worked. We sang, a couple of times. But now it's just... Silence.

The machine is supposed to work by pulling you backwards towards the Philadelphia Experiment but we're looking to see if you can use it to move forwards. If it goes well, we could... I could... I could figure out how to go home. It's a snowball's chance in hell, but come on... I wouldn't be dead! Dead to the present, at least, or however that would work with paradoxes and San Dimas Time or whatever.

Is it worth going back? I wouldn't be returning to the 20[redacted] I left in the first place, I know that much. There's no way each molecule would align the same way and create the same world I left behind. Not now. I wouldn't have the same relations with the same people even in the best circumstance. Why would I expect those exact same bodies to even exist, the same pattern of genetics and circumstance to correspond to the people I knew? [OB]Not that I had a ton of friends back home... It's a little disheartening. But I'm afraid that Partridge and Whickman and them would judge me if I didn't make every effort to get back home. That's what I'm supposed to do, right? Go back to the... [sigh] back to the future? Goddammit.

[[SFX: radio tuning; sounds of a diner]]

JW: Good, because I'm practically famished.

PENNY WISE (PW): I'll be sure to have 'em throw extra turkey on that club. Between you and me, I think they're a little stingy.

JW: I appreciate that.

PW: Don't you worry hun. I'm Penny, give me a holler if you need anything at all.

JW: I'll be sure to-- I'll take you right up on that.

PW: I hope you do.

ER: Er, Penny? Could I get another cup of coffee?

PW: Sure thing sweetie, I'll be right back.

JW: Nice to meet you...

[[SFX: Penny walks off]]

SG: Wow, kid, the sparks are flying.

JW: What are you talking about?

SG: That whole thing there! Come on, don't tell me you didn't see it. (dramatic voice) I'm practically famished!

ER: I'm not seeing it.

SG: He was practically falling all over her!

JW: I told the girl I wanted a sandwich.

SG: Sure, with your mouth. But I saw it in your eyes. You fell for her, hard.

JW: Sally, the girl is irrelevant, I'm on my lunch break, and she's at work. Not exactly the best time for a meet cute.

SG: No, it's the perfect time! You come back later tonight, ask her when she gets off shift...

JW: And does she have any say in the matter?

SG: Of course, she's totally into you! Very progressive of you though, Wyatt. Way to buck stereotypes.

JW: ...Thank you?

[[SFX: Penny comes back with coffee]]

PW: Here's your coffee. So where'd y'all move in from?

ER: New Mexico. Our company just moved us up to the mountains.

PW: Are y'all the ones who moved into the old lumber warehouse on the edge of town?

SG: That's us.

PW: Well, welcome to Point-of-Exile.

SG: Thank you Penny-- uh... What's your last name?

PW: Wise.

SG: Well Wise, this guy here was just raving about the excellent service we've had from you today.

JW: Sally, what are you doing—

SG: In fact, he was just telling us that because of you, we're gonna make this our new lunch spot in town.

PW: Well, gosh...

JW: No, I didn't, I was just--

PW: You were just what?

OBJER: He was just what?

JW: Nothing. I just... Appreciate... Good service. That's all.

PW: Well, I... Thanks. I do what I can. I'll be right out with your sandwich.

[[SFX: Penny exits]]

SG: See?

ER: Oh yeah, I definitely see it now.

JW: It's not anything! You're just putting words in my mouth! Matchmaking is more complicated than just telling two people they like each other!

SG: So you do like her...

ER: Haven't you ever seen Holiday? Or The Shop Around the Corner? In that one they couldn't stand each other!

SG: Oh! You've Got Mail!

ER: Exactly. You get mail, and it turns out to be from the very person you despise. All it takes is one word.

PW: And what word is that?

ER: Uh, nothing.

PW: I've got a Reuben for you--

ER: Thank you.

PW: Biscuits and gravy here--

SG: Excellent, thanks much.

PW: And a turkey club, piled high.

JW: Oh, wow, I'm not sure I could ever finish this in one sitting.

PW: Well if you ever need an extra hand to finish that, I sure wouldn't mind. Holler if you need anything else, okay, sweetie?

JW: Actually, I do have something.

PW: What is it?

JW: Would, um... Would you...

PW: Yeah?

JW: Is your name really Penny Wise?

PW: [exasperated sigh] Yeah. My parents thought it'd be a real riot.

JW: At least it's easy to remember. You're unforgettable… Um, hi, Jack Wyatt.

PW: Well Jack Wyatt... Find me tonight, and I'll tell you all about it over some pie. We close up around 9. Until then, Ace, I've got tables to see.

[[SFX: Penny exits]]

JW: Okay, now I see it.

[[SFX: radio tuning; Sally and Anthony working on machine]]

SG: And Wyatt goes [buffoonish voice] "I don't know what you're talking about! I don't even like girls" and I tell him to shut his mouth and talk to her. Or, open his mouth I guess--the point is that he was wrong.

[[SFX: Timepiece on; static distortion]]

SG: Ok, check it now.

AP: One-twenty.

SG: Damn.

[[SFX: Timepiece off]]

SG: So I tell him to go pester the girl after work, and I don't even need to, she comes back with food with full flirt on. The girl--and her name is Penny Wise, get it? Pennywise? Swear to God, real name--

AP: Sally, what are we doing here?

SG: What do you mean? You mean right here, right now? Or existentially?

AP: Across the gamut. I think I need to recalibrate my various internal compasses.

SG: Well, our natural body processes are pumping oxygen-rich blood to our tissues while electrochemical signals in our brains are simulating the complex but handy illusion of consciousness and controlling the body: hands, arms, feet, legs. Your vocal cords are vibrating to push air through your mouth, shaped by your teeth and tongue, to be interpreted by my brain as language.

AP: ...More generally.

SG: We are using tools to do our jobs.

AP: Sally! Stop being a smart alec.

SG: We are checking for faults in the main circuits of the Applied Higgs Inhibitor Array, codenamed TIMEPIECE, in preparation for a round of tests.

[[SFX: Timepiece on; static distortion]]

SG: How bout now?

AP: One twenty-three.

SG: Damn.

[[SFX: Timepiece off]]

AP: And why are we doing this?

SG: Because we work for a super top-secret division of the intelligence community of the United States of America and want to make sure that it is up to snuff.

AP: And why we doing that for them?

SG: Because they are incredibly powerful, because they pay us, because Donovan gave a stirring speech, and because it's the only chance to work on science literally decades ahead of its time. Take your pick.

AP: And why do they want that?

SG: Are they a person, object, or mineral? What's with the Twenty Questions?

AP: I'm curious. Why do they--why does Donovan--want the Timepiece?

SG: Are you going to get to the point?

AP: How did we get here?

SG: Oh, come on, you're not–

AP: No, I mean from Polvo to Point-of-Exile.

SG: We drove in a van.

AP: No! I mean... before you got here, I was managing half a dozen cutting edge research projects. After that, you became a daily thorn in my side--

SG: And I'd hope, a trusted friend and colleague.

AP: That too. And then things started snowballing. The Timepiece ramped up, there was a trip to Las Vegas, and then Quentin's accident, and apparently you did some pretty amazing work the night of the Christmas party. I missed out on most of that, but Jack told me it was like you were in three places at once.

SG: Ha, well, that night was pretty fuzzy for me too.

[[SFX: Timepiece on; static distortion]]

SG: Try it now.

AP: My point is, I can't help but do the calculus and say that Timepiece hasn't brought anyone anything but trouble.

SG: That could be true.

AP: So why does Donovan keep putting his faith in this project? In us?

SG: I don't really know. I know what could happen, what amazing things we could do, if we ever worked out a system for using this thing effectively... But you're right. We've failed plenty. More often than not, actually.

AP: So I ask again: What are we doing here?

SG: ...I want to see this machine work. I want to see it help somebody.

AP: Wasn't that the problem? You can't see it working? It either worked, or it didn't, and no one could tell, or something like that?

SG: If you could see what changed... If you could... Ugh. I don't know. Who knows what happens when you change something small. What does the meter say?

AP: One twenty-seven.

SG: Perfect! Okay. Let's get this puppy fired up.

AP: Well, two years ago I was basically your boss and today you're definitely my boss.

SG: Listen, Partridge. I'm not your boss. Of all the people here who could be your boss, I'm the most not your boss. Partridge, Timepiece needs you. This team needs you. I need you. But not as a subordinate. I need someone who looks ahead as I look behind. The miracle of the Timepiece isn't just moving backwards, it's the possibility of using it to change how we move forward. And you're the only one who can help us with it. Without you, the Timepiece is stuck. Ready?

AP: Ready.

[[SFX: flipping switches, Timepiece spooling up]]

AP: Sally... If the Timepiece is successful in doing what it's doing, do you think you would go back to the future?

SG: I don't know. But I'd rather have the option.

[[SFX: the Timepiece activates; radio tuning]]

SG: Diary of Sally Grissom, March 1st, 1946. Without boring you with the details, the hypothesis didn't hold up during the Timepiece test. We now know, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that going forwards in time using the principles of the Timepiece is effectively impossible. I mean, going forwards in time has always been possible, just... at the rate of one second per second. I know the last time I did one of these I hemmed and hawed about not wanting to go back to 20[redacted] but now that I know I can't, well... it hurts. I mean, it was a long shot to begin with, but now that we have the numbers to back it up I can't help but feel like a petulant child who wants what she can't have. The grass is always greener, you know?

The results aren't all bad. We got a better look at the tachyonic photon response that comes from using the Timepiece. Improperly modulated, it would cause something like the electromagnetic pulse I saw back in my first months with ODAR. But, with a little tweaking, it seems like you could dictate the frequency of the pulse, like a sort of "signature" assigned to a specific activation of the Timepiece. Of course, it only really exists at the point of origin and then travels backwards in time towards the Eldridge, so my apologies go out to the crew of the Eldridge in October 1943 who spent their trip being bombarded with an ever-growing number of tachyons. If you had something there to receive them, though, you could probably keep track of all the jumps made with the Timepiece. You'd have to move the anchor point to a different listening station, or set up something to receive pings from the future when Rainbow was turned on, you might even be able to set up a system to track them. It wouldn't not come in handy, you know? What would you if you could map the shifting sands of time?

[[SFX: radio tuning; static distortion]]

BD: It will go without saying that you couldn't spread that information from this span... room. You can't spread this from this room.

AP: But people need to know! You're sure it's because of... what you did... with the Timepiece?

CW: If it wasn't there before, the Timepiece accelerated it. His tenses are a mess.

BD: [coughs] You're to be thanked, Chet. I will be able to... I can talk on my own. Just give me a minute.

AP: Why didn't you bring Sally in on this?

BD: Sally was volatile. We're keeping this close to the vest.

CW: Please, you have to help him. You understand that all of it was for the good of ODAR, for the good of all of us. And now he's dying.

AP: What do you want me to do?

BD: I needed you to get the right answer. Help what's wrong with my thinking.

CW: You're the only one we've got.

AP: Director… Bill. I will do everything I can to save you. I will get you through this, but you have to come clean to the team. At least tell Sally. She deserves to know about what you did.

BD: We've talked about this. But only where you find the right answer. Next to then don't speak to anybody. Not acceptable.

[[SFX: Bill coughs; static distortion intensifies

CW: Anthony... Help him. Please.

[[SFX: tape recorder stop]]

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ars PARADOXICA is created by Daniel Manning and Mischa Stanton.
Episode 06: Exile features –

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Charlotte Mary Wen (Penny Wise)
with special thanks to Isabel Atkinson

Original music by Mischa Stanton.
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20 18 01 01 24 04 07 09 22 | 10 23 25 17 03 14 09 08
WEATHER: foggy

07: Distraction

WRITTEN BY DANIEL MANNING
DIRECTED & SOUND DESIGN BY MISCHA STANTON

[[SFX: tape recorder starts]]

CALLER 1: Can you give me a name at the very least. Or how the patient got this bad so fast.

ANTHONY PARTRIDGE (AP): No, I can't tell you who. Or why.

C1: But the timeframe for the degradation, that's got to be exaggerated–

AP: Best estimates suggest the majority of the damage happened over about 10-14 months… I know.

C1: You're yanking my chain. Did Simmons put you up to this?

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

SALLY GRISSOM (SG): Diary of Sally Grissom, August 18th, 1946. You know I gotta say, I think living in Point-of-Exile has really been good for my long-term mental health. I'm not surrounded by military police, I can walk more than a mile without hitting empty desert, and I can have a hobby that isn't immediately snatched up by the War Department. In the last couple months I've sort of become Point-of-Exile's resident tinker. Fixing appliances, that sort of thing. News of my "Answertron" spread quickly— nothing stays quiet for long in a small town like this. I started getting calls from people I don't even know just so they could hear it. A lot of them were disappointed when I actually picked up, and at least one didn't even believe I was really on the other end of the line.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

SG: Hello?

SALLY'S CALLER: Oooh, so how is this supposed to work?

SG: Err... like a phone call? You talk to me, and then I respond? We, uh... converse?

SALLY'S CALLER: Woooow. This is amazing! Absolutely amazing. You must have a lot of responses, right?

SG: Responses to what? Oh no, no you're talking to me. To a person.

SALLY'S CALLER: Yeah, right. See this all sounds good, real convincing. But I can tell. It's your voice, it's all high-pitched. You sound like a Victrola.

SG: Oh, wow. Whoops, you got me. Yup, I'm just a recording.

SALLY'S CALLER: Heh, I knew it. What a two-bit con.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

SG: I don't know what she expected, that I was some kind of perfect telephone robot ghost in the machine? I would need like to like, what, solve voice synthesis, speech recognition, natural language processing and just have a few dozen teraflops lying around? Come on. I might be genius from the future, but I'm not magic. That said, I've realized that the calculations required by the Timepiece are definitely going to need a computer. Well, maybe not the full von Neumann compatibility, but it's going to need an internal logic unit of some kind, and it can't be the size of a pickup truck, so I've been tooling around with... "pre-inventing" the transistor. I requisitioned some germanium and some gold, but this stuff is a lot harder to find when you don't have the full power of Bell Labs behind you. Half the labor is in getting materials pure enough to work with. It's not like there's a rare metals refinery in town. I mean, I do have a small forge, but it's not like I could just take... Hmm. I've got an idea. I'm going to have to come back to this.

Anyway, so I've been trying to keep stuff like this outside Wyatt and Roberts' work, because I believe there's still room for surprises in the world, but I think I might talk to Partridge about it. His background will help with the logic gates, and he's been a pretty good sounding board, if nothing else. When I've got transistors down, I might try my hand at building a portable radio, though that could be getting a little ahead of the 20th century, so I won't push my luck.

After we disproved Roberts' theory of positive-time motion a few months ago, I've had the team working on something different: using Timepiece tech to generate a region of null-time motion. Basically, we crank up the emitters until the gluon wall just barely begins to condense, then pull back on the ... it's just a–it's a time bubble. Time passes in the bubble, time stays still outside the bubble... Time bubble. I don't need to use impressive jargon all the time. What is this, my graduate thesis? So, [begins to accelerate] we're essentially trying to oscillate the time direction of a spatial volume in an anchor field at a frequency that neutralizes the negative-time acceleration to achieve a Minkowski inner product with a null signature— I'm doing it again. Basically [defeated, robbed of her technobabble crescendo] you use the Timepiece to move backwards for, say, one second, and then let one second of real time elapse, then move one second backwards, then one forward second. Et cetera. Outside time stays frozen in that second. Time bubble. Of course, cycling once per second is far too slow and unwieldy to be practical, so you need to increase the frequency of those micro- jumps a whole lot, and that is a dangerous prospect with the Timepiece. Anyway, that's why I need better computing: to stop physics from ripping itself a new asshole. Again.

And while Roberts and Wyatt work on that—well... white Roberts works on that, Partridge is going into a deep dive figure out how to utilize the tachyonic burst created by Timepiece jumps. Photons moving faster than light are released at the position of the event, and travel backwards accordingly. Years ago in Polvo when I first met Partridge we had an issue with a similar emission knocking out power in the town because of a test in our relative future. But since then we've figured out how to stop it from causing electrical interference. I remember realizing that in the hours leading up to the revision of that Timepiece spec that since we didn't measure any interference, our hypothesis would be correct. Getting the results before you've started--oh, if all my work could have gone that smoothly.

I think about the Sally Grissom I was three years ago. Like, if she were confronted with a paradox like this. She'd shy away from it, or stick her fingers in her ears and tune it out, or maybe just run away screaming in terror. But... will grow since then. Have grown since then? Now, I only mostly want to have run away... I mean, I just only mostly want to run away.

[[SFX: static distortion]]

SG: ...Jeez, word salad, am I right? Ugh. You're never going to respond, are you. I guess even I wish my recordings could talk back.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

CALLER 2: I am at my home, Anthony. I'm fresh off an eighteen hour shift and I don't have time for your fantasy patient games.

AP: I understand you've just gotten home, Gordon. If you could just tell me... Gor— [hangs up]

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

ESTHER ROBERTS (ER): Alright, I'm heading out. You two have got it from here?

AP: Yep, I just need to finish up some paperwork.

SG: Huh. Roberts, I think this is the first time in a month you're out of here before we are.

ER: I wanted to actually make myself look nice for once before the show. I'm excited, aren't you?

SG: Can't wait.

ER: See you in a few hours.

[[SFX: Esther leaves]]

AP: She’s gone. So what did you want to show me?

SG: OK, Take a look at these blueprints.

AP: Sure, let me see…

SG: I've been working on a new circuit design. Should decrease the load on the navigation layer.

AP: What is this supposed to be? I mean, it looks like a... no, that can't... but...you must be joking. This is a joke, right?

SG: Nope, all real. Theoretically validated. I guess, if you believe the ontological validity of a theory of electricity that only exists in my mind–

AP: Is this your own development, or is this a cheat? You know what, I'm not sure it matters. Either way, I'm impressed.

SG: Well, a little bit of it is my own ingenuity so I could actually build it... but yeah, I had help.

AP: Does this do what I think it does?

SG: Mm-hmm.

AP: You’ve cracked semi-conduction. This doesn't have the reliability issues of cat's whiskers?

SG: Just you wait. In my day there'll be billions of these on a board the size of a quarter. They’ll toss these into Hallmark cards. And then you’ll throw them out because they are at best trivial and at worst actively irritating.

AP: You're dangling a beautiful future in front of my face that I'll never get to see.

SG: Who's to say you won't see it?

AP: I've done the math, Sally. I'll be nearly a hundred by the time your present comes.

SG: You won't have to wait that long. You’ll definitely see at least the greeting cards. Well, you'll probably have to wait a few decades before the really cool computer returns start coming in, but–

AP: What are you going to do with this?

SG: Well, I've just got some blueprints and a marginal confidence that it’ll probably work. But in the future, I want to use a version of this to start building discrete logic gates.

AP: For the Timepiece?

SG: That's the idea, yeah. If we can offload some of the calculations from the mechanical switches, we could cut down on the size and get a navigation vector that much faster.

AP: Off the top of my head, we could slim down to just the first three bays, and then take the... [sigh] Why did you have to show me this?

SG: What do you mean?

AP: I've got a one-track mind with this kind of stuff. I'm a greyhound. Dangle something shiny and new in front of my face, and nothing in the world will stop me from daydreaming about the possibilities here with your... what are you calling it?

SG: It's a transconductive circuit.

AP: And what is it called in your day?

SG: ...It's called a transistor.

AP: And I was going to tell you to stop going forward with your telephone experiments...

SG: You, uh... you know about that?

AP: Of course I do. I was at Lou's Diner, and I heard someone talking about some woman with a weird gadget on her telephone. Weird gadgets lead right to your door.

SG: I was just tinkering around with some stuff...

AP: Were you tinkering around, or were you testing the waters of how much 20[redacted] you could bring to town?

SG: You were the one who told me that it didn't matter if I altered the past–

AP: Sure, but that was before all this Timepiece drama… before we lost Quentin.

SG: That... wasn't my fault.

AP: I know it wasn't, there was an angry widow and some sort of self-fulfilling paradox logic, I get it. But you have to admit that you--that all of us are toying with forces outside of our control.

SG: Now you're the one giving lectures about where man was not meant to tread.

AP: I'm not just talking about the science… You might be wise to keep a low profile. Do you remember, back in Polvo, the G-man who told us we were fired?

SG: Sort of. Collins? Cornwall?

AP: Cornish. Hank Cornish.

SG: What about him?

AP: I saw him the other day.

SG: You saw him?

AP: Down at the five-and-dime. He was just walking through the aisles.

SG: Wha–here? Like, Point-of-Exile here? And it was him, the same guy?

AP: I'm sure it's Cornish. He even said he was working with the Central Intelligence Group when he showed up in December...

SG: Which means he could just be part of the upcoming CI move-in over the next couple months–or he's just here on a holiday or...

AP: Or...

SG: ...There's something weird going on.

AP: That's got to be quite the coincidence, Sally. The guy who hands out our discharge papers suddenly shows up right in our backyard?

SG: The backyard that Donovan says is so remote we may well be ghosts?

AP: Something's up, I know it.

SG: I'd say you were being paranoid if I didn't already know that we have good reason to be paranoid.

AP: What I'm trying to say, Sally, is be careful. There are monsters under the bed, whether you can see them or not.

SG: I'll sleep with one eye open.

AP: Good move.

[[SFX: radio tuning; TAP cart rolling]]

SG: *(out of breath)* Grissom diary. About quarter before eight, August 18th. We're investigating some of Partridge's claims about the appearance of one Agent Hank Cornish, so I've snuck the TAP out after hours. To be fair, we don't exactly have the best security at the research site.

AP: Or any security at all, really.

SG: Well, we have Whickman.

AP: Is he really security? I thought he was just Bill's majordomo.

SG: According to him, he's bounced all over the place. It's not like we have ranks anymore. I thought you didn't want your voice recorded, for culpability's sake.

AP: Ah hell, I'm sure they have enough to hang me for treason somewhere. How did you even convince me to come out here in the first place?

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

SG: I'll sleep with one eye open.

AP: Good move.

[[SFX: Anthony returns to work]]

SG: Partridge?

AP: Yeah?

SG: Do you want to borrow the TAP and investigate what you saw–

AP: –Absolutely.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

SG: As I recall, it wasn't difficult.

AP: What about you?

SG: Well, my audio diaries probably paint a pretty damning case against me.

AP: Did I ever tell you my theory about Polvo?

SG: Which one?

AP: Microphones in the walls.

SG: Huh?

AP: Occasionally, when I was working, or eating dinner, I'd hear a little whirr. Helen insisted I see a doctor, get my ears checked, but they never found anything. I used to joke to myself that Bill had put microphones in the walls and recorded everything we said.

SG: Funny joke.

AP: He loved the damn things, too. Once said something about radio being the future of espionage.

SG: You’re saying everything we ever said in New Mexico was bugged?

AP: Probably not. It’s more likely paranoia manufactured by my overtired mind. I mean, there was probably a recorder in his office, which makes sense, but everywhere? I mean, come on, that’d be overkill.

SG: Yeah.

[[SFX: signal corruption]]

SG: Overkill.

AP: Of course, your gadgets are the future of espionage now. No pun intended.

SG: Yes, there was.

AP: Yes, there was. So are we going to do this? I feel weird standing alone in this parking lot.

SG: I’m booting it up.

[[SFX: TAP booting up]]

AP: I gotta say, we do have some really neat toys. It’s smaller than the last time I saw it.

SG: I made a few modifications to the TAP right before Polvo fell apart. Inside here, there’s a heavily-modified miniature version of the Timepiece. We don’t have to keep it plugged in. Also, it’s inert now.

AP: I’m so glad I won’t have to worry about June Barlowe murdering me.

SG: Well, not through cross-time shenanigans, at least. Do we... What ever happened to her?

AP: Chet, uh... hmm. You know, I'm not rightly sure. She fired a gun on an employee at a military base... I assume she must have been court-martialed, or something.

SG: Huh. Grim. So when did you see Cornish?

AP: It was after work on... Wednesday.

SG: Let me see...

[[SFX: the TAP rapidly clicks backwards]]

SG: Wednesday evening, you said? A more accurate timeframe would help.

AP: Try between six-thirty and seven.

[[SFX: the TAP switches to hourly resolution, then minute resolution]]

SG: Well there's you. Did he have anything distinguishing on? A hat, or something?

AP: Look at this scene, Sally. Do you see anyone not wearing a hat? Hell, I'm wearing a hat right there.

SG: I'm sorry I asked.

[[SFX: tuning the TAP]]

AP: Ooh, wait, stop! That's him, that's him right there.

SG: That guy? Let's get a closer look.

[[SFX: SG begins rolling the TAP closer, not noticing a PEDESTRIAN.]]

PEDESTRIAN: Oh, excuse me!

SG: Oh, sorry!

AP: Sorry, excuse us, Department of the Interior.

SG: No, come on, that can't be right.

AP: We've got to follow him.

SG: What?

AP: We have to follow him! Find out where he goes, what he's doing.

SG: Partridge, it's getting pretty late. The show is starting soon.

AP: I know, I know. Just humor me. We follow where he's going, see if it's anything interesting, then I'll drive over there. You won't miss it.

SG: I thought you would be the one who was concerned about missing it.

AP: ...This was your idea. Are you going to help me or not?

[[SFX: radio tuning; TAP in a moving car]]

SG: This is the slowest speed car chase I've ever heard of.

AP: Well, if you paid better attention to the car we're tailing, I wouldn't keep missing turns.

SG: I'm looking through a seventy-five pound time traveling camera. It's not exactly designed for mobile use.

AP: All of these houses look the same at night.

SG: Hey, he's slowing down! He's pulling into that house over there! Remember the address: 175 [redacted] Ave.

AP: Is he doing anything else?

SG: I don't know, probably putting away his... someone else is pulling into the driveway.

AP: Oh good, more spooks.

SG: Uh-oh.

AP: What?

SG: Drive. Now.

AP: What is it?

SG: Just drive!

[[SFX: the car speeds away; the TAP powers down]]

SG: Whickman was there. Showed up at Cornish's safe house like he was expected, like he was coming around for Sunday brunch. They must be working together.

AP: That's inferring a lot of intent from what you saw.

SG: I know what I saw, okay? You were right. There's more than meets the eye. Are you happy?

AP: Why the hell would I be happy about this?

SG: Let's just go to the thing, okay? I don't want to think about this until tomorrow.

AP: I'm... I can't go.

SG: Why not?

AP: I can't.

SG: You're not going to show up for your own wife?

AP: It's not that!

SG: It's actually exactly that. Few statements are as definitive as "I can't go" because you aren't going to a thing.

AP: Look, I'll drive you over there. But don't tell Helen I did. Don't tell the rest of them I was here either. I'll bring the TAP back to the lab, and no one will know it was moved.

SG: Jesus, what's wrong with you? I'm not gonna lie to your wife for you—

AP: So you're just going to go in there and tell her "Oh, your husband and I stole some equipment from work so we could spy on some spies?"

SG: ...No.

AP: Good. Thank you.

SG: What am I going to say when she asks?

AP: Tell her... I don't know. Tell her whatever feels right.

SG: Except the truth.

AP: I know I'm asking a lot of you. But thank you

SG: You better not be seeing someone on the side.

AP: I promise you, I'm not.

SG: I believe you. But I'm not sure that makes it better.

[[SFX: Anthony pulls up; Sally gets out; radio tuning]]

CALLER 3: I don't believe that there's no way this isn't radiation poisoning. If I could just take a look at the patient...

AP: It's NOT radiation. I'm telling you, it's not... actually. What would you think if there was radiation?

[[SFX: radio tuning; inside the jazz club]]

SG: Hey there Officer Whickman!

CHET WHICKMAN (CW): Doc! You came to see her perform?

SG: Yeah! Wanted to come out and show my support.

CW: You seen Dr. Partridge around anywhere?

SG: Can't make it. He was mumbling something about leaky capacitors when I left. Sends his regards to the woman of honor, obviously. Roberts, Wyatt, and his girl are over at a table over there, you want to join us?

CW: Yeah, I'll stop by, sure.

[[SFX: tape fast-forward]]

ER/JACK WYATT (JW): [greeting Chet]

PENNY WISE (PW): And who might this be?

SG: Penny Wise, this is Officer of the Very First Class, Chet Whickman. Whickman, Wise.

CW: Pleasure to meet you.

PW: I'm sure.

JW: Chet's the man who keeps us safe while we're on campus.

PW: What's the threat to a weather research station? Jackrabbits? Radio men, raiding for forecasts? Rowdy clouds?

CW: [laughs] There's always something going on. You should be grateful that my job is mostly quiet.

ER: Guys, shh, she's on.

[[SFX: applause]]

HELEN PARTRIDGE: *(on stage)* I hope you folks didn't miss me. It's been a while.

[[SFX: The band strikes up, and Helen sings "A Nightingale Sang in Barkley Square"]]

That certain night, the night we met
There was magic abroad in the air
There were angels dining at the Ritz
And a nightingale sang in Barkley Square...

ER: She's fantastic!

PW: Does your friend do this often?

JW: It's the first time in a long time, I think. Do you know how long it's been, Dr. Grissom?

SG: I, uh... err... eye-uhh-no?

CW: I don't think Helen has sung in public since the Partridges flew to New Mexico. It's a shame. Don't hide your gifts–you know, like the Parable of the Talents?

PW: I thought that was a story warning against burying money in the ground.

JW: I thought it was supposed to be Christ's endorsement of investment capitalism.

CW: What I'm saying, is she should keep it up. I think there's a future in that for her.

JW: Yeah, if only Dr. Partridge had been here to see it.

ER: Where is he, anyway?

SG: Still at work. He didn't want to miss it. You know how busy we've been.

JW: Blame me for it.

ER: We usually do, Jack.

SG: At least we got out.

JW: Why don't we do this more often, anyway? I feel like I never see you all anymore.

ER: Yeah, Jack, why do I never see you any more?

JW: Ever since I got one round ahead of you in our Dilemma series, you've been dodging me at lunch.

PW: Dilemma?

SG: Esther's mom invented this card game. Jack's the only one of us who can play it.

CW: She tried to teach me once and I got a nosebleed.

SG: I'm never sure what's happening, but I'm pretty sure they're both crazy good.

ER: Yeah, you are the one dodging our game. What's with you, Jack? Do I have to find another opponent who won't resign the second there's a stage 51 on the table?

JW: Oh, so since you miss winning I've gotta put my suit flop on the line so you can try to build another slow run?

ER: I wouldn't need a new opponent if a worthy one would just step up. I'm right here, like I've always been.

JW: The stakes as high as they are, it might be prudent to play something else.

ER: I don't know why I'm even fighting for this. You can barely hold a River Set together. It's like watching a toddler doing her taxes.

JW: I'd thought you'd want an easy fight. That way you can put your name all over the leaderboard and you don't have to share it with anyone.

ER: Leaderboard? What leaderboard? Nobody else plays. There's a big empty space right where your name is, and you're the one who gave it up. You. Jack Wyatt, Friend to the Common Man and Deserter of Games!

JW: I gave it up as much as you gave up your pair of fives during the Black Friday Bout. I know you were cheating.

PW: They're not arguing about cards, are they?

SG: Nope.

ER: That's preposterous and you know it./ Come on, lay all the blame on me. I know you want to. Because you're too scared to admit you lost.

JW: /You know what you did. A guilty conscience needs no accuser.

ER: And yet, you accuse! I had both of those fives fair and square. I shouldn't put up with this weak tea when I could get four times the competition from Dr. Grissom.

SG: Don't bring me into this.

ER: Oh, well excuse me for wanting to explore a deep and engaging ruleset with a friend.

JW: You should try playing against yourself, you know? It's exhausting. "Quiver this" and "divide the flop" that. It's not Solitaire, Esther.

ER: Why play when your opponent is a goldfish on the floor?

JW: You know, you are such a—

PW: Jack?

[[SFX: Penny stands from the table]]

PW: Jack, I think it's time to go.

JW: Yeah, I... I think that would be a good idea.

PW: I'm really sorry. Jack's really sorry, too.

[[SFX: they leave]]

ER: He better be, or—

SG: Esther, not the time.

[[SFX: the song ends; applause; radio tuning; outside da club]]

JW: It's, well, I'm feeling... I don't know how to put it. Is there some Greco-Roman-sounding word that means a mix of fear, malaise, and anger?

PW: Ennui?

JW: ...I shoulda known that one.

PW: You said it, not me... What's wrong?

JW: I almost died in the service of not ruining a Christmas party. That's not a healthy work environment.

PW: That's one way to put it.

JW: And the project? I don't even know what we're doing anymore! The end goal is... I'm not sure I ever knew what it was.

PW: It isn't right. He doesn't get to treat you like yesterday's news and still work you like a dog!

JW: Penny...

PW: Jack, look around you. The war's over, it's time to stop fighting.

JW: But I don't want to leave! Sally might act like a moon person, but she's saved my bacon more times than I can count. And I've worked with Esther since my graduate days. [sigh] She was right that I've been letting her down. It's not fair to her. Or the rest of them.

PW: I know you care about your friends, but you've got to do what's best for you. And I don't think that it's going to be slaving away on secret science whatever-the-hell-it-is until there's nothing left of you. You had too much to drink tonight and got a little heated. Nothing wrong with that.

JW: Yeah, but how many nights am I gonna have just a little too much, and then, and then things get heated… I feel like I'm out of control. Ever since the morphine they gave me ran out, I've had this pain in my head. Where I was hit.

PW: I'm so sorry.

JW: Nothing makes it go away... nothing except the drink.

PW: Oh, Jack, I had no idea–

JW: Sometimes I can't get out of bed without any. One time, I even calculated how long it'd be until I was sober and could go to work. I didn't want to say anything, because things have been going so well and... I'm just

afraid. It hurts so much to think with the pain. And what good am I if I can't think?

PW: You're good to me. You're better than you think. I don't want to see you hurt yourself.

JW: I don't know if I can choose between pain on one side and poison on the other.

PW: Those can't be your only choices. We'll find another way.

JW: We? I figured if I told you, you'd be gone faster than a—

PW: I'm not going anywhere. I'm so glad you told me. Now I can help too.

JW: Penny, I... Thank you.

[[SFX: radio tuning; different phone calls]]

AP: The patient's symptoms include nosebleeds, lesioning, risk of hemhorrage, aneurysms, inflamed hypothalamus, aphasia-

[[SFX: switch]]

AP: He's got frequent nosebleeds-

[[SFX: switch]]

AP: -hypothalamus is inflamed-

[[SFX: switch]]

AP: There is a massive-

[[SFX: switch]]

AP: Extensive… lesioning-

[[SFX: switch]]

AP: -risk of hemorrhage-

[[SFX: switch]]

AP: -of the brain—

[[SFX: switch; in office, Anthony on phone; Chet enters]]

AP: If it makes you feel any better, I've never heard about "tense-specific aphasia" either. Yes, I know you're the doctor, I didn't mean— Okay, well thanks anyway. Thank you. Yeah. Goodbye. [[SFX: Anthony hangs up]]

CW: I take it there's been no luck.

AP: I called everybody I knew. A few people I don't. You won't be happy with the results. You said you were working on something?

CW: They've been testing an experimental therapy on rats. Results were... inconclusive.

AP: How inconclusive?

CW: It might help him, but it might not. No matter what, you really don't want to be one of those rats.

AP: It doesn't sound like our most solid plan ever...

CW: Whatever we do, it would be cutting it close if we started on it yesterday.

AP: We're out of options... Dammit.

[[SFX: tape recorder stops]]

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ars PARADOXICA is created by Daniel Manning and Mischa Stanton.
Episode 07: Distraction features -

Kristen DiMercurio (Sally Grissom)
Reyn Beeler (Chet Whickman)
Robin Gabrielli (Anthony Partridge)
Susanna Kavee (Helen Partrige)
Katie Speed (Esther Roberts)
Zach Ehrlich (Jack Wyatt)
Charlotte Mary Wen (Penny Wise)
Zak Stevens, Erin Bark (additional voices)
with special thanks to Isabel Atkinson

This episode features the song "A Nightingale Sang in Barkley Square," performed by Susanna Kavee, as well as original music by Mischa Stanton.
ars PARADOXICA is brought to you by The Internet: It's never been easier to call your mom, tell her how you're doing.

21 25 15 25 15 10 | 01 06 | 01 22 01 | 23 12 10 24 08 17 01
WEATHER: showers

08: Cage

WRITTEN BY DANIEL MANNING
DIRECTED & SOUND DESIGN BY MISCHA STANTON

[[SFX: tape recorder starts; Jack and Esther play cards in the breakroom]]

[[Jack and Esther are sitting around a table, playing cards. AP watches them. We hear nothing but the sound of them playing for some seconds. JW slaps the table.]]

ESTHER ROBERTS (ER): Hmm...

[[SFX: cards]]

ER: Oh, yes!

JACK WYATT (JW): Dammit.

ANTHONY PARTRIDGE (AP): Was that good, or...?

[[SFX: cards]]

JW: You sure you want to do that?

ER: Sure as the sunrise.

JW: Okay...

[[SFX: cards]]

ER: Huh. Interesting.

[[SFX: Sally runs into the breakroom]]

SALLY GRISSOM (SG): Oh my god oh my god oh my god...

AP: Sally?/**JW:** What's going on?/**ER:** Oh my goodness, Sally, what's wrong?

SG: There was a time bubble, that I… uh...

[[SFX: Sally faints]]

ER: Dr. Grissom!

[[SFX: tape recorder stops; ***THEME SONG***; tape recorder starts]]

JW: Sally, what happened?

SG: There was... it was so dark... I was screaming. You couldn't hear me?

AP: What do you mean? We didn't hear anything.

ER: I'm going to get her some water.

[[SFX: Esther stands, gets water from the sink]]

SG: Something went wrong... something went wrong with the Timepiece... wait, what year is it?

JW: Oh, no.

AP: Sally, it's 1946. It's August 2nd, 1946.

SG: That's good. I'm still in today.

ER: Here, drink this. Take it.

[[SFX: Sally drinks]]

ER: Check her watch.

JW: She's ahead of us by about, I don't know, an hour a half?

ER: We just saw you a minute ago.

[[SFX: radio tuning; a loose circuit sparks]]

SG: You go on ahead. I'm just going to finish installing the new focuser assembly, and I'll catch up with you later.

JW: Don't take too long. I've got a feeling our next Dilemma round is going to be one to watch.

[[SFX: Jack and Esther exit]]

SG: *(under her breath)* I'm sure, if anybody understood it.

[[SFX: Sally tinkers with the Timepiece; the circuit completes; the CAGE spools up]]

SG: Whoa, no no no, what the f-

[[SFX: The CAGE zaps, only for a moment]]

SG: *(screaming, tortured)* Help!! Help!!... oh my god...

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

SG: I don’t know what happened. It activated all of a sudden and the room went dark, so dark...

ER: You know what this means?

SG: I’ve never seen anything that dark...

AP: She got stuck in null-time for an hour and a half and was totally fine.

SG: Fine?!

ER: Maybe not ship-shape. But it stopped external photons, just like we predicted!

JW: And she didn’t get shredded by the micro-jumps!

SG: Come on!! You guys, I... I appreciate your attempts to theorize, but, uh... I’m going to take a half-day.

ER: That’s understandable. Feel better, Sally.

JW: Are you sure you don't want to let a medic take a look at you? We're still not really sure what the null field even does to a person–

SG: I’m going home.

JW: Okay, but...

AP: Jack, just let her go home. Besides, if something bad happened to her, it’ll stay with her. Time travel isn’t contagious.

JW: But it is bad for you?

AP: I... never said that...

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

SG: Diary of Sally Grissom, August 3, 1946. Yesterday was almost 26 hours long for me. How weird is that? The team has been working on using the Timepiece to generate a null-time field. We weren’t anywhere ready to get inside it, but there was an incident... I guess I must’ve switched something, or crossed some wire, and the thing turned on. I was trapped in a time bubble for, like, an hour and a half. It was terrible. You’ve never known true darkness until you’re stuck in an place where even light can’t get in.

I only escaped after the generator wound down; I tried to cut the power, but something about being stuck in a single moment makes this version of the Timepiece incredibly energy efficient. Converts 99% electricity into 100% psychological torture. Heh-heh{.}

Donovan might be happy to hear about that... except that he hasn't been reviewing our reports anymore? For a guy who fought tooth and nail to keep us working, Donovan is sure taking a hands-off approach. But I've learned not to ask where he's concerned.

Despite everything I had to go through, the null-time field worked better than we could have ever expected. Of course, now we have to learn, and test, and improve. We need to figure out more about how the null-time field works—

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

SG: —of Sally Grissom, September 8, 1946. So after my somewhat-successful accident with the Timepiece's null field generator last month, we've been trying to take the technology to the next level, and I think we're ready. Oh, remember last week when I said I was working on a new name for it? I think I've settled on "the CAGE." Controlled Asynchronous Generator Environment. Get it? I worked on that for... like, hours, probably. You may call it frivolous, but I firmly believe in the efficiency of descriptive backronyms.

So ever since I started working for Donovan, we've had trouble showing off a practical use for the Timepiece technology. We tried a dozen ways to show off the uses of time travel, but without a perspective that follows an altered timeline, an observer could never see that anything had actually changed. But I think the CAGE is what I've been looking for. After three years of working on the Timepiece and a year and change working on the original Higgs Inhibitor Array in the 21st Century, I finally stumbled into something actually demonstrable! I admit that it's too little too late to save the rest of ODAR, but to be perfectly honest, I don't know that I would have been able to help them anyway. There's a reason no one in my time remembers Polvo, NM. The Manhattan Project had them beat. A big bullet in a big gun to end the big war. But a time bubble? That's got finesse, it's got style... And a ton of different uses. I'm not sure what we do first, but the team filled a couple chalkboards with ideas.

[[SFX: radio tuning; Sally writing ideas on a chalkboard]]

SG: Come on, guys, no wrong answers. I know manufacturing is the obvious answer here, but there's more to this.

JW: Alright, you could... grow a fruit orchard on a moment's notice?

SG: You'd need a real big warehouse or something, but I like your style! What else?

AP: A computer could give you an answer as fast as you needed it to.

SG: I like it. You've got vision, Partridge.

AP: That's literally my department. But thank you.

ER: What if you could... age wine faster?

JW: Really, Esther? Your idea is “let barrels sit for a long time?”

ER: Oh, well excuse me—

SG: Hey, Wyatt! No wrong answers in brainstorming.

ER: ...What is brainstorming?

SG: You know, whisky works too. Perfectly reasonable use for the CAGE.

AP: Sally, I don’t think we’re all on board with that name.

SG: My machine, I get to name it.

JW: *(aside)* Told you.

ER: Shut up.

SG: Ooh! I’ve got one! Nap as long as you want! Nap for days! Who doesn't like naps?

JW: Hey what about instant movie theaters?

SG: Love it!

AP: Big private reading rooms. Take as long as you need with any book.

SG: Time enough at last! What next?

ER: How about the world’s fastest oven?

JW: That’s just my fruit idea again!

ER: Kitchens aren’t farms, Jack.

SG: I like that one. Did you guys know that you can use radar signals to cook food?

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

SG: —but most of those ideas are going to require people inside the CAGE. And even though I spent some time in there, it wasn’t a) on purpose; b) very long, relatively speaking (and technically not very long objectively speaking either): and c) collecting data was the last thing on my mind. So tomorrow, our very own Esther Roberts is going to voluntarily spend twenty-four hours inside. We drew straws, well, they drew straws. I made myself exempt, and Partridge was going to be the lucky one to go in there, but Roberts confessed she was actually interested in doing it herself. She said she wanted to be "a pioneer in emerging science"-- which, y'know, good for her--and Partridge was

more than willing to step aside. He says the idea of the CAGE is eerie enough, let alone actually being inside it. So tomorrow is going to be Roberts's big shot, and we're all excited to see what happens. She'll be fine! Heh… She's going to be fine.... Yeah.

[[SFX: radio tuning; computer running calculations]]

SG: –corder is tuned to pick up the frequencies we're looking for.

JW: So are you ready for this, Esther?

ER: You've asked me that a dozen times already. Maybe my answer will change after the thirteenth try.

JW: So are you ready f– ow!

[[SFX: Esther hits Jack]]]

AP: No horseplay, kids. This is serious.

ER: Dr. Grissom, what was it really like in there?

SG: Well, outside of the endless darkness, pretty boring. I hope you brought some books.

ER: I've got a flashlight and some stuff in my bag to keep me from getting bored.

AP: And there's food and water and extra batteries in that crate, so as long as things go as planned you won't starve.

ER: As long as it goes as planned...

AP: Plans are the best I got.

ER: ...You can't make an omelette without cracking a few eggs, right?

SG: I'm just hoping none of the eggs in question are your brain. I'd hate to lose the only other woman in this damned crew.

JW: Ok. So we're clear, with the current mass calculations I've calibrated the Timepiece controls to generate the null-time effect at a three-meter radius for twenty four hours.

[[SFX: Chet enters]]

SG: Whickman, right on time.

AP: Alright Esther, I'm going to start up the condenser coils. We'll be right here the whole time. Literally.

ER: You guys are lucky. You'll only have to deal with this for maybe thirty seconds, tops.

[[SFX: the CAGE spools up.]]

CHET WHICKMAN (CW): So Doc, what's this you wanted me to see?

SG: We built the Timepiece to generate a time bubble. Roberts is going to spend a day in there while only a moment passes out here. Pretty cool, right?

CW: Wait, she's going inside the machine?

SG: No, she's just going to be hanging out inside that tape circle on the floor there.

CW: No, she can't! You have to stop this.

AP: This isn't the time, Chet. The machine is already running. If we cut the power there's no telling what would happen–

CW: Esther! You need to get out of there Esther!

ER: *(yelling over the noise)* What?

[[SFX: Chet runs to Esther]]

CW: Esther! It's dangerous!

JW: ES[THER!]

SG: WHI[CKMAN!]

AP: STOP HI[M, NOW!]

CW: WAIT!

[[SFX: the CAGE opens up around them; the voices of Sally, Jack and Anthony trail off]]

ER: Great, now you've done it.

CW: I've done it! You're gonna kill yourself.

ER: Wow, it really is dark in here. Hold on.

[[SFX: Esther rummages in her bag; clicks on a flashlight]]

ER: Much better. You didn't have to do that. We've been running the numbers for days, we knew what we were doing.

CW: Miss Roberts, I’m not normally the kind of man to swear in front of a lady, but you don’t know what the hell you’re talking about.

ER: Oh{!} What brutish words{!} Whatever shall happen to my delicate ears now they’ve been pierced by your cursed profanity{!}

CW: How long are we trapped in here for?

ER: When we thought it was going to be just me, the trip was planned for 24 relative hours–

CW: 24 hours?!

ER: –but now that you tackled me and we're both stuck, who knows.

CW: I was trying to push you out. This place, it’s dangerous!

ER: We had it calibrated for a single subject and supplies. You just made it more dangerous. Nice work. Regardless, we’re stuck here for the next day. I hope you like reading, I've got a whole stack of Astonishing Tales, Detective Comics, a deck of playing cards… and a few crosswords, but those are just for me.

CW: Shouldn't we have a protocol in place where if your security officer starts screaming “Stop! Stop!” you’re supposed to stop? This was a terrible idea.

ER: We’ll be fine. We’ve got four days of rations for a 24-hour stay. Well, two days of rations with you, I'm not going to let you starve, but we’ve got books and lights and... everything I needed for this expedition. There's only one sleeping bag, but I think there's a blanket in there you can use.

[[SFX: Esther rummages through the supplies]]

ER: Nope, there isn't. Hope you don't get too cold on the floor.

CW: It’s the Timepiece. It’s not safe.

ER: Its as safe as we can make it. What do you think you're paying us for? Unless... you know something we don’t.

CW: The most I can tell you is that it’s... poisonous somehow?

ER: Like, “bee sting” poisonous or like “a heavy dose of cyanide” poisonous?

CW: Neither of those. Using the Timepiece... it poisons the mind, but not physically. It’s like knowing that the chain of cause and effect is all messed up in your head starts eating you from the inside.

ER: How do you know all this?

CW: Can't tell you.

ER: Because, wait, don't tell me, it’s classified.

CW: –Classified, yeah.

ER: You’re going to do this here? Look around, who am I going to tell? Hey everyone! Time travel is bad for you!

CW: I’m not concerned about you telling anybody while we’re in here. It's once we get out... If we get out...

ER: And whom would I tell about this on the outside?

CW: Your team, obviously. Sally, Jack.

ER: What, I can’t keep a secret? Besides, why shouldn’t they know? ....Actually, wait a second, why didn’t they know?

CW: I can explain–

ER: You’re going to just spring this on me that this is dangerous? We've been working with this thing for three years! How long have you known about this? If you didn’t know about our experiment today you would’ve never said anything, would you?

CW: It’s not like that!

ER: Then what is it like?

CW: Knowing about it makes it worse.

ER: [laughs] What is that supposed to mean?

CW: From what we can tell, finding out what the Timepiece does to you only makes your condition get worse. I shouldn’t even be talking to you about it.

ER: What are you basing this on? Why do you know about this? Give me one shred of evidence on this.

[[Chet is silent.]]

ER: Okay, fine. You want to act like a child, be my guest. I’ve got all day. I’ve got books and puzzles. I'll be fine.

[[SFX: tape fast-forward; Esther reading]]

ER: Want to tell me what you know?

CW: Nope.

ER: Fine.

[[SFX: tape fast-forward; Esther doing a puzzle]]

ER: How about now?

CW: I'm comfortable right here.

[[SFX: fast-forward; Esther shuffling a deck of cards]]

ER: Ready to talk?

CW: Yup.

ER: Really?

CW: Nope.

[[SFX: tape fast-forward]]

ER: Hey, Officer Whickman?

CW: I'm still not talking–

ER: No, it's not... Can I ask you something?

CW: [sigh] Sure.

ER: Do you think we'll get out of here?

CW: ....Why are you asking me? You're the scientist. Aren't we supposed to?

ER: Yeah, but... what if we don't? What if you running in here threw off something and now it's stuck on? What if Sally getting out was a fluke? What if we died in here, and a second later all our friends see are two person-shaped piles of dust?

CW: It's possible, but I don't think so.

ER: Why? You've got no idea how this thing works. Our team could write volumes on the Timepiece and never scratch the surface. What makes you so sure?

CW: I've got faith in you. And Sally, and Anthony, and Jack. You're the smartest people I know.

ER: But we've failed so often in the past. What if we just end up like Quentin Barlowe?

CW: You guys have failed before because of poor planning and vengeful spouses, but never for being smart. That you can rely on.

ER: ...Thank you.

[[SFX: tape fast-forward]]

CW: It's Bill Donovan.

ER: Finally talking?

CW: You want to hear this or not?

ER: I'm sorry, go ahead.

CW: Bill is sick. He's got... He's developed this condition. Call it whatever you want. Timepiece disease? Whatever. He's... We're not sure how much longer he's got.

ER: Okay, how did he contract this condition?

CW: He's been using the Timepiece. To go back in time. A few times... A bunch of times.

ER: Nobody has used the Timepiece. It only works to send things back in time, nobody has actually done it themselves–

CW: You may have... missed out on some things. While we were in New Mexico, Director Donovan, he.... He had one built for his own personal use.

ER: ...Are you serious? Does he know the harm he could have caused? To us? To spacetime? To–

CW: I'm sure he's become acutely aware of the damage he's caused.

ER: Because now he has, what, the time travel shell shock?

CW: That's the theory we're working on.

ER: Okay, who is "we?"

CW: I've had some of Donovan's contacts in the intelligence community working on it, even though they don't know he's the patient. And I've got Dr. Partridge pouring through all the Timepiece documentation to figure out what exactly is causing all this.

ER: Why not talk to Sally? Why not Jack, or me?

CW: You two would tell the Doc.

ER: And we can't tell Sally because, what, she's been exposed to the Timepiece more than we have? Jack and I have logged just as many hours around that thing in the past three years.

CW: Sally's a... special case.

ER: What the hell does that mean?

CW: Has she told you anything about what she did before she started working with us?

ER: What does that... I don't know, something about a lab in Connecticut, where she developed the Timepiece by accident, then got contacted by Donovan and moved out to Polvo?

CW: That's eighty percent of it.

ER: And what's the rest of it?

CW: She was working in that lab [redacted] years in the future. Something went wrong, and now she's here. She was the reason things didn't end up working out in Philly.

ER: Huh... I feel like I should be more shocked at that.

CW: [laughs] It does explain some of her oddness, right?

ER: ...Now I kind of have all these questions for her, but I don't know what I'm supposed to ask, or if I'm supposed to know... I feel like I need to get to know her all over again.

CW: Well then, you're in luck. As you know, it isn't hard to get Sally to speak her mind.

ER: So what I don't understand is... what did the Director do with the Timepiece?

CW: What would you do with it?

ER: Nothing. I wouldn't use it.

CW: Aren't you a saint. Pretend to have less noble intentions.

ER: Uh… fix my past mistakes and set myself up for future success? ...Sally said something like this would happen when we moved here!

CW: By that point she was a bit late by at least half a year. Maybe more.

ER: Why are you telling me all of this? What happened to your web of secrets?

CW: Well it's like you said, it's not like you can tell anyone for however many hours we're still in here.

ER: And what about when we get out?

CW: When we get out... You aren't going to say anything.

ER: Or what?

[[Chet is silent]]

ER: Oh.... I mean, I know you could kill me, but... Whenever I thought about it, I never thought you would do it... To any of us, I mean.

CW: I would. If I had to.

ER: I see.

CW: But honestly Esther? What I need right now is someone in my corner.

ER: Threatening to shoot me, then asking me to be your friend... you really know how to charm a girl.

CW: Listen, with Donovan out of the picture for the foreseeable future, I'm in charge of our little operation. I already have been, for a little while now. And I need someone I can go to who [OB]isn't generating more chaos. Someone like you, Esther. This is an opportunity. To do some good. For Bill Donovan, for... For everyone.

ER: To do what? Keep secret from my friends and help fix my boss's weird case of hubris-itis?

CW: Bill isn't the only one who's exhibited symptoms.

ER: ...Sally?

CW: Not all of that oddness comes from the future.

ER: Chet, you could just say yes. You really need to learn how to be more straightforward.

CW: [laugh] Sorry... Force of habit. Comes with the job, I guess. So, Miss Roberts, what's it going to be? Can I count on you?

ER: Shouldn't I not un-disagree?

CW: Very funny! You're catching on quick. Never use one definite word when four ambiguous ones will do.

[[Esther laughs]]

CW: I'm serious. You could do this. I think of all of us here, only you can do this. Help me use what we've got to help people. Isn't that what you want? To be a pioneer? Isn't that why you signed up to live a whole day in the blink of an eye? To be bold? To do what's never been done?

[[SFX: tape fast-forward; Esther and Chet play cards; the CAGE begins to collapse]]

ER: okay, after you've done that, you build the river with a run of cards-

[[SFX: the CAGE dissipates]]

JW/AP/SG: *(overlapping)* Are you all right?/Thank goodness/What happened?

ER: It's over. We're back.

SG: They were both in the null field and they're both still alive and sane! That's a good sign.

ER: Ooooor we've come back to haunt youuuuu as tiiiiime ghooooooosts—

JW: Well, as sane as when she went in!

AP: Chet, what the hell was that about?

CW: I, uh, uh-

ER: -There was a misunderstanding about the parameters of the experiment. I cleared up all the confusion while we were in there. In… wait, in then?

SG: In that?

JW: During then?

ER: Yeah, in there.

AP: And what does the timer say?

ER: It shut down at twenty-two hours, thirty-eight minutes and zero point four zero nine seconds.

SG: So the extra mass didn't throw off the effect significantly! Neat.

JW: So are we just all shucks-n-smiles here now? Nobody cares what just went on? Esther, what even happened in there?

ER: Nothing unusual. We chatted, talked about books, the weather-

CW: The lack of weather-

ER: And I taught him Dilemma-

CW: Started teaching-

ER: Pretty mundane.

[[SFX: tape rewind]]

CW: —you signed up to live a whole day in the blink of an eye? To be bold? To do what's never been done?... Do you want to know a secret?

ER: You must be full to bursting with them.

CW: I killed him. I killed Quentin.

ER: I thought his wife did!

CW: Mostly. She fired a bullet that kills him in our next timeline, and from there it becomes that... tragic cycle. But the first bullet that shot him came from somewhere... somewhen else. Back when the Director was using the Timepiece, he came across this one audio wire. Gave it to me. It came from another timeline. That we don't remember.

ER: Because that's how timelines work.

CW: Right. But it turns out I killed Quentin the first time. That version of me fired the bullet that hit our version of him.

ER: And what were you aiming at?

CW: That's the weird part... I was actually trying to shoot Quentin. You see, right around when he died, I was doing an internal review of our staff. Once he was dead I skipped over him. But in a timeline that he hadn't, I guess I must have found out he was some kind of a double agent? His whole file was a fake.

ER: You're kidding...

CW: The weirder part was when I asked the Director about it. Turns out, Quentin was never Quentin. And he didn't work for the Axis, or the Russians or anything, he worked for us. He was spying on us for a version of the Director in the future. And the then-present... wow, this is complicated, hold on... the then-present Director had no idea until he started using the Timepiece to manipulate things, but that other version of me didn't know that. He just had orders to eliminate spies on sight. So one of the bullets he-me shot hit the Timepiece as it was spooling up, went back and hit the Quentin we knew.

ER: That's... he's insane. Why would Donovan send someone to spy on himself?

CW: He likes to keep tabs on his enemies. And the Director is his own worst enemy.

ER: So all that grief with June, that was his fault?

CW: You could put it that way.

ER: Why?

CW: Just his paranoia—

ER: Why tell me this. All this, it's.... It's too much...

CW: Because I'm in charge now. And with your help... I'll make sure nothing like that ever happens again. You told me you wouldn't use the Timepiece. I'm telling you, it's going to get used. I'm going to use it. That's why I need a saint like you. To help me use it the right way.

ER: ...Okay.

CW: Okay?

ER: Okay.

[[SFX: tape recorder stops]]

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ars PARADOXICA is created by Daniel Manning and Mischa Stanton.
Episode 08: Cage features -

Kristen DiMercurio (Sally Grissom)
Reyn Beeler (Chet Whickman)
Robin Gabrielli (Anthony Partridge)
Katie Speed (Esther Roberts)
Zach Ehrlich (Jack Wyatt)
with special thanks to Isabel Atkinson

Original music by Mischa Stanton.
ars PARADOXICA is brought to you by The Internet: You will never find a more wretched hive of scum and villainy. (Seriously though, go see the new Star Wars. It's great.)

17 11 23 15 11 05 16 | 26 06 | 19 23 18 | 07 20 16 07 04 02 | 07 21 21 05
WEATHER: showers

09: Decay

WRITTEN BY JULIAN MUNDY
DIRECTED & SOUND DESIGN BY MISCHA STANTON

[[SFX: tape recorder starts]]

SALLY GRISSOM (SG): Diary of Sally Grissom, December 23rd, 1946. This year, our Christmas miracle came in the form of some really... Is "weird biz" too unscientific? It's some weird biz. Partridge and I have been working on a computing processor that utilizes the time-freezing properties of the CAGE to solve some optimization problems. Basically, a computer running inside the CAGE gives you effectively immediate results. In itself, pretty cool–but it gets cooler. Using Partridge's predictive model running on a parallel processing unit, it predicts likely results and feeds those back into the initial process. Run a few thousand iterations and you get a result orders of magnitude more accurate than anything you get until... actually, I don't even think 20[redacted] had anything that precise. He's been calling the whole thing the "Asynchronous Processor"–the APU. It's a new level of hell to program for, but did I mention it's basically instantaneous? There's no codified operating system for it yet, but once there is, I've got the perfect name for it: NostradamOS. Man, I'm good.

Anyway. The thing works well enough when it relies on mechanical switches, but a digital system would work so much better–and wouldn't require a warehouse full of vacuum tubes. Naturally my first thought was to upgrade the APU to use transistors. It should've been a straightforward issue, mechanically. With the new setup, we started to get results almost as soon as we put them in. But they're a mess. The results come in jumbled, or degraded. Too few bits, or too many. We've all checked and re-checked the machine, and nobody can figure out what's wrong. Roberts thinks that it's totally random, but Wyatt is betting on a ghost in the machine. Like, the Ghost of Data Past, or something. Spooooooky! Either way, it's pretty frustrating not even knowing how to start answering a question. Alas, such is science.

Speaking of spooky spooks, I've been seeing some new faces around town. They've all got this G-Man look to them. The high and tight haircut, the shirt collars just a little too crisp. Clerks, security, office staff. You name it. I've got a feeling that each one of them has a big "CLASSIFIED BY ORDER OF" stamped somewhere in their file. Our year is up; the CIA is here. They give me this awful sense of déjà vu, like I'm back in New Mexico. They all give me looks as I walk by them... Or maybe it's just my paranoia. It's gotten to me before.

[[SFX: radio tuning; Sally soldering, Anthony working on a problem set; Sally burns herself and drops the iron]]

SG: Ow! Dammit.

ANTHONY PARTRIDGE (AP): Sounded like it hurt. You all right? I can check the icebox–

SG: No, no, it's fine. Just pass me that one over there. Over–

AP: This one?

SG: Yeah, that one. Thanks.

[[SFX: Sally searches for parts; Anthony stops working]]

AP: You and Helen talk, right? You're friendly? Friends?

SG: Eh, friendly. I guess. Why?

AP: Does she tell you much about herself, or... Us?

SG: I already don't like where this is going.

AP: Helen and I, we've been having this... disagreement. Remember when we all went to Las Vegas last year, and we saw the Trinity test? She got it in her head that what we're doing here is going to bring about the End of Days. Since then, things haven't been the same between us... She refuses to understand how important this work is.

SG: How rude of her{.}

AP: We're so close now, on the brink of really changing the world here. It's incredible, but it's also an enormous pressure. Can't she see that?

SG: I think she knows exactly what sort of pressure you're under. I think that's the problem.

AP: What do you mean?

SG: I've seen your punch card. You're pulling twenty-five-hour days. You're sleeping on a cot you stash under your desk.

AP: You have an identical one under yours—

SG: Partridge, you've already got a bed! A real bed. And a woman at home who wants you in it beside her!

AP: When I'm there we... I don't know. We float around each other. Two planets in orbit. I'd want to spend my time where I can be useful.

SG: When was the last time you took a day, just to be with her?

AP: Well I mean... Not since... I.... I guess it has been a while.

SG: I remember that night in the desert. There was more than just the bomb. Do you remember? The campfire? The story about your first date, that bottle of wine?

AP: Yeah...

SG: There. That face. That's the face you had on that night. You love her, man. Plain and simple. But you know when else you made that face? After the bomb went off.

AP: It's not that simple, Sally. I've devoted five years of my life to this project because the stakes are being measured in real lives! We're on the brink of changing the world!

SG: You're not a quitter, Partridge, anyone can see that. But I think the once you get over the sound and spectacle of your newest toy, you're afraid of what happens next.

AP: You think I'm scared? That's your brilliant theory?

SG: How about it? Come on, you were commissioned for two years to create a model for predicting the future. You know more about prognostication than anyone. Can you divine what happens to you if you keep going on like this?

AP: Back off, Sally. Right now.

[[SFX: Esther and Jack enter the lab]]

SG: So yeah! I think you're scared! So scared, in fact, that you can't even listen to the advice that you asked me for!

JACK WYATT (JW): Family squabble? Hey, can I join in? Since we don't get to go home for Christmas, I kinda missed it this year.

SG: Partridge and I were having a lively debate about the... data entropy problem with the APU. But he's refused to hear my sage advice.

AP: [scoffs]

SG: Maybe you two will have better luck.

ESTHER ROBERTS (ER): ...So?

AP: What?

ER: What's the question? Must be a doozy if it set Sally frothing like that.

SG: Hey! I do not froth!

JW: Sometimes you do. Just a little.

AP: What I was going to say was, the asynchronous processor still encounters fatal errors in 3% of its calculations. It has to do with the new electronic switching system. The memory system doesn't seem to parse bits correctly along the predicted pathways, and that 3% is enough to scuttle anything else it tries.

JW: What did you call it Sally? A ghost in the machine? I wonder if it's friendly like that Casper...

ER: Shut up, Jack.

AP: I appear to be left with two possible issues. One: there's a fault in how power is being distributed and confuses the processor and interrupts its sequencing. Two: the asynchronous processor simply doesn't—

SG: Partridge, you're killing me. If you don't like APU, at least come up with something catchy.

AP: What? Fine. What about the....Extra-Temporal... Or... The Recursive Antitele[phone]-... no... Oh! The SuperLuminal Recursive Processor! SLURP!

SG/ER/JW: [laughs]

ER: Really Dr. Partridge? SLURP?

AP: Wha— Okay! I don't have Sally's gift for naming. Fine. But without a fix, we're dead in the water.

SG: It is gonna be a challenge to refit the CAGE for the bigger computer when this one doesn't even work.

JW: This thing already takes up half the lab with all its hardware. Any more and Dr. Grissom is gonna have to work on the Timepiece in between databanks C7 and C8.

SG: Not exactly cost effective. Or even very practical.

AP: Come on, guys. I need something here! I'm missing something crucial.

ER: We spit in the face of practicality all the time, Dr. Partridge, it usually works out. Fringe benefit of knowing Dr. Grissom.

AP: She does usually have some kind of insight right about now...

SG: ...Oh, so now you want my help?

[[SFX: radio tuning; Christmas music in breakroom]]

JW: So Esther... Are you and Chet doing anything for the holiday? Eh? You and Chet? Going out maybe?

ER: What? What are you talking about?

JW: Come on. You guys've been seeing each other, right? Since a few months ago, the CAGE fiasco?

ER: No! Why would you ever, ever think that?

JW: Well you've been so tight-lipped about what went on in there... In a dark, enclosed space... Nothing to occupy yourselves but some well-thumbed comic books...

ER: Hmmph. "Well-thumbed." This is what's become of all my hard work? You're a pig.

JW: No, Esther, come on, I'm happy for you! Isn't it nice, being with someone? It's exactly what you need. I mean, how long has it been since you had some poor sap wrapped around your finger? What, grad school?

ER: I'm sorry, you'll have to repeat yourself, I couldn't catch it through all the oinking and grunting.

JW: Uh, as I recall, you were all over the "clumsily set Jack up with a beautiful sweet waitress" bandwagon.

ER: Yeah, you're welcome, by the way. How is Penny?

JW: Wonderful. The diner's closed this week so we spent most of the weekend together at her pl—...we… uh… We spent it together.

ER: Why Mr. Wyatt, I never thought a gentleman like yourself would kiss-and-tell{!}

JW: Don't change the subject. How many times has Chet Whickman whispered sweet classified nothings in your ear?

[[Esther remains silent]]

JW: ...Did....Oh, he did, didn't he? He told you something in there—

[[SFX: Jack turns off the radio]]

ER: Nothing happened, alright? I tried!

JW: Oh, come on, what's the dirt? Spit it out.

ER: I... I can't tell you.

JW: ...Really?

ER: It's not because I don't want to! I mean, Jack, come on. I would tell you. But Whickman, he... You know what I mean! Double dog-dare top secret

material, man with a gun, lockable doors! It doesn't work out well for people who make him upset.

JW: ... I don't know if you've noticed, but there have been a lot of staffing changes upstairs, and you know as well as I do they're not locals. They're from Washington, or wherever the factory is that churns 'em out by the truckload. Intelligence types.

ER: I haven't seen anything.

JW: Yes you have! Don't do that. You've seen them too, I know you have.

ER: Jack, I've heard of paranoia, but this is just—

JW: It's not paranoia, dammit! I know Whickman is scary, but don't play into their games, Esther! You're better than that. Take a long hard look around, and tell me you haven't been getting a feeling just like after… after what happened... The Christmas party. Last year.

ER: So what if I have?

JW: Look, Penny and I have been talking. And she... We're catching the next train out of here, Esther. Next stop anyplace else.

ER: So... you're leaving us, then.

JW: Our year is up, the G-men are here, and they're like sharks, Esther. Sharks that caught a whiff of blooding the water. And I'm not sticking around until dinnertime.

ER: So just like that? The government gets here and you get gone?

JW: Yes! Right now, A-S-A-P! Most riki-tik, like the jarheads say! Before Donovan or Whickman or we can do any more damage, Esther! Have you forgotten about Victor Lambert, last Christmas? Or Quentin Barlowe before that? Those men are broken. They were good men, and the US government used them up until there was nothing left.

ER: I remember, but you can't put that on... we're still in the dark about what happened to him.

JW: "In the dark?" Funny you should mention that, because that's right where I feel like I am right now! You spent a day "in the dark" with Chet Whickman, and now you're playing into their game. True or false?

ER: ...What we do is complicated. Knowing every detail doesn't make what we have to do any easier.

JW: You sound like them, Esther. You sound like Whickman and Donovan and all the other faceless grey suits that will say anything as long as we keep our heads down and keep the progress coming. You... I thought we wanted to

help people. Who was the last person the Timepiece helped? You can't name one, because there aren't any! It's ruined lives, Esther, in the most horrible ways! And Dr. Grissom...

[[SFX: Esther stands, goes to the sink]]

ER: She ever doesn't talk about her family. You notice that? Doesn't feel right that nobody's thought to ask after her.

JW: She would just deflect the question. What are you getting at?

ER: You really want to leave?

JW: I want to leave. I want all of us to leave! Why is it so important to you to go down with this ship?

ER: Because if there is still the chance that I– that we could get it right. If we walk away, no one ever gets that chance again.

JW: So if the ship is sinking, you'd rather be the one at the wheel. That's a very specific kind of crazy.

ER: People used to think of visionaries that way. Hindsight told us they were brave. You could be that for Penny, Jack. You could be that for us, too.

JW: ...I should invite Sally over for Christmas, huh?

[[SFX: radio tuning; the Timepiece spools up; Sally types on a keyboard]]

AP: This time for sure. This time for sure. This time. For sure.

SG: CAGE cycling up in 3-2-1.

[[SFX: CAGE powering up, leveling off; printout]]

SG: Cycling. How're my babies?

AP: Getting something, but... No, dammit!

SG: Same result?

AP: Just, look at this. Each result is broken in its own unique way. A beautiful, incomprehensible snowflake. None of these data correspond to anything we entered. One more time, then?

SG: Partridge, I don't know who's more fried: the electrical grid, or my brain. It's only 5:30, you should have plenty of time for dinner–with your wife.

AP: This again? Sally, I can't go home yet!

SG: It's Christmas, buddy, that's kind of a big deal around here.

AP: This system has got to be greenlit by New Years.

SG: Has got to?

AP: Yes. And I'd rather not get into why–

SG: Dammit Partridge, this isn't healthy! I don't know how much clearer I can make it! You're going to waste away or go crazy down here if you keep this up! Go home to what's left of your family!

AP: That's almost funny, coming from you.

SG: Beg your pardon?

AP: Why won't you just let this go? At first I appreciated the concern, but now I'm starting to lose patience with this–this obsession you have! Am I taking up too much space? Cramping your style? You're the last person to lecture me about taking a break from work!

SG: Have a Merry goddamn Christmas, Partridge{.}

[[SFX: Sally leaves; radio tuning]]

SG: Diary of Sally Grissom, December 24, 1946. You know, I never really got Christmas. As a thing. I don't. It only reminds me of being a moody teenager again, awkwardly crammed in the corner of a room full of adults who have no idea what to say to you, or whether they even should say anything to you at all? A time that is supposed to bring people together, but it just makes you feel even more alone? I used to roll my eyes at Christmastime, as soon as people started swapping out spooky lawn ornaments for candy-colored lights. It's just another excuse for Americans to flood every store in the nation to spread some Christmas cheer with their hard-earned dollars! The most wonderful time of the year–fiscally speaking!

But I walk around this quiet little mountain town, and… it's like all my naysaying falls apart. Because you know what? They believe in it. There's no plastic trees, or department stores, their Christmas cheer isn't bought and paid for. Their cheer is real. These people huddle around their warm fireplaces, and they actually care about each other. You know? Like, what kind of person would I be if I didn't see something so... [sniffs] It's just, it's hard, you know? Look at Partridge, he's so happy to piss it all away when he doesn't even make a... It doesn't even make sense.

He's gotta know, right? He has to know what she's ready to do.

[[SFX: knock at the door]]

ER: *(through the door)* Hello?

JW: *(through the door)* Hey Dr. Grissom! Sally, are you in there?

SG: Oh shit. [sniffs]

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

AP: Beginning 20-variable phase of tests, Asynchronous Processor with CAGE umbilicus feeding into modified Grissom transistors. Input variables are regarding outcomes in the event of the death of William Donovan.

[[SFX: the Timepiece spools up; Anthony types in variables; the CAGE activates; results print out]]

AP: Results of test 44-C determined with speed thus far characteristic of current specs, with... characteristically incomprehensible results.

[[SFX: Anthony crumples the result]]

AP: ...Christmas. Christmas now, evil machine tomorrow. I'm coming, Helen.

[[SFX: Anthony stands, knocking over his recorder]]

AGENT MARSH (AM): Oh, good evening, doctor.

AP: Uh, good evening. Can I help you with something?

AM: No sir, just closing up for the night, making sure everyone gets back home for a piece of Christmas Eve.

AP: Well, er, I was just getting ready to do that, if you'll give me a moment.

AM: Afraid I have to ask you to clear out now, doctor, if you could just leave everything as is.

AP: Why, Mr...?

AM: Marsh, sir. Agent Nicolas Marsh.

AP: Agent... I see.

AM: I have to lock up, sir, if you don't mind.

AP: No, certainly. Of course. Merry Christmas, Agent Marsh.

AM: And you, Doctor Partridge. God bless.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

JW: *(through the door)* Sally, open up! We have a question!

ER: *(through the door)* There's a doorbell, Jack, maybe she can't hear us–

SG: Hang on a second!

[[SFX: door opens]]

JW: Sally! You're still here, that's great!

SG: What's up, guys?

ER: We were afraid Dr. Partridge had already asked – wait, have you–

SG: Just get inside, it's freezing!

[[SFX: Esther and Jack enter; door shuts]]

SG: What is it?

ER: Have you been crying?

SG: What? No! Why are you even here? I have a phone.

JW: We tried calling. More than once, even. It went straight your Answermatic, I had to leave messages.

SG: Answertron. Again: you, here, why?

JW: Alone in your house on Christmas Eve, sobbing into a tape recorder, [sniffs] sober as a judge, with the phone disconnected? Oh my God, if there's a frozen dinner on your kitchen counter Sally, I might lose the will to live.

ER: Jack, please. Sally, I hate to agree with... any of that, but come on. We came here for you, y'know.

JW: Isn't there some Grissom family homestead you should be going to?

SG: [deep breath] Okay. Okay fine. You know... I might be committing treason or something, but fine. I'm not just a genius scientist who invented a time machine. I'm from the twenty-first century. I built the prototype Timepiece by accident. I showed up on the deck of a battleship and puked all over a sailor's blouse when he helped me to my feet. Then Donovan Shanghai'd me to Polvo. Then... Then Donovan Shanghai'd me to Polvo– Nothing? Really?

ER: I don't think we're really surprised by this job anymore, Sally.

JW: And we did already popped the cork on time traveling last Christmas.

ER: Wait, we what now?

JW: –I'll tell you later.

SG: You're both serious.

ER: We are. Face it, you're just different, always have been. People notice, but they aren't us. They wouldn't know what they're looking for.

JW: And nobody I ever met speaks the way you do. Or eats the way you do. Or stares blankly into her coffee when she's mulling a problem the way you do.

ER: He's right about your diet. It's truly frightening.

SG: I... Thanks? Thank you? I think? Why are you guys being so nice about this?

ER: *(doing her best Whickman)* That information is classified, Dr. Grissom.

JW: Wait, did you really lose your lunch all over a sailor when you got here?

SG: Actually... it was Whickman.

[[Sally, Esther, and Jack all burst out laughing, freeze frame end-of-70s-sitcom-style; Esther and Jack trail off well before Sally does, who starts to sound slightly manic.]]

SG: *(still fighting for breath)* Okay, okay, so what was so important you dragged yourself through hell froze over to tell me?

JW: Well, we'll be cutting it close, but I had already invited Roberts, who already did her… her weird candle thing–

ER: It's a menorah!

JW: –And Penny did say I should bring my friends, so... You want to spend Christmas with us?

[[Sally starts crying]]

ER: Jack!

JW: Omigod what did I say what did I say Sally omigod please Esther fix this Esther fix this right now–

ER: Honey, what's wrong?

SG: *(tearful)* It's not his fault. I'm just kind of a mess right now. Thanks Wyatt, I'd love to come. Yes, definitely.

JW: Ok, but does this mean we can plug your phone back in? So we can laugh at the terrible messages and actually call you if we need to?

SG: What is your deal with my phone? How many messages did you guys – [leave?]

[[SFX: Sally plugs the Answertron back in and hits play; the tape is distorted]]

SG: Wait a minute...

[[SFX: a corrupted message from Jack]]

SG: Did this whole spool get corrupted?

JW: Power surge?

ER: It's entirely possible, given the power draw from the APU. I've never heard of a surge causing signal decay like this though.

SG: But listen to it, it sounds like... Like a pattern. Like a pulse. Signal decay… I need to get to the lab!

ER: We just came from there though!

JW: Ughhh, you're ruining Christmas! This is just like that time my dad fell off the roof dressed like Santa Claus.

SG: It's a tachyon pulse! From the Timepiece. Like the signal tracking we cooked up in March! Or the power surge in Polvo? It's the pulse! Of course it's the pulse! I need to get to the lab!

JW: Are we really going back to work right now?

SG: Think of it as a Christmas present for Partridge.

[[SFX: phone rings]]

JW: See? Someone wants to talk to you. A Christmas miracle.

ER: Could be a Hanukkah miracle.

JW: Hanukkah's made up, Esther–

SG: Go warm up the car, I'll be out in a sec.

JW: All right.

[[SFX: Jack and Esther leave; Sally picks up the phone]]

SG: Hello?

[[SFX: radio tuning; voices heard through phone]]

SG: Hello?

HELEN PARTRIDGE (HP): Hello, Sally.

SG: Helen? Um, hi, merry Christmas—

HP: I hope you're satisfied. You know, with your progress. Your happy little hive.

SG: I don't understand. Helen, is everything ok?

HP: I think you have a pretty good idea of how "everything" is. You're not deaf or blind, unlike some of us!

SG: Helen if this is about Anthony, I—

HP: Shut up! Just. Shut. Up. For once in your life, you don't get to wriggle out of something by talking about it until it's alphabet soup!

SG: Helen, please just tell me what's wrong–

HP: NO! No! Anthony and I – we had a life! Then he took a government job and things got hard, but we were strong! He loved me! I trekked out to the middle of the desert, and never did I once doubt we would be together forever. He was going to save the humanity and made me believe he could do it. And who should appear one day but the great enigma that is Sally Grissom? The cherry on top of a sundae of secrets we'll all take to our graves, like it or not! You know, the last time I got up on stage, I just wanted to just replace the words of a song with every secret I have ever had to keep for you, or Anthony, or Bill Donovan. Belt them out for this whole benighted little town to hear, with a double encore!

SG: I feel the same way.

HP: Don't speak to me like you're just the same as any normal person, Sally Grissom! I don't know what you think is acceptable behavior where you're from. Who you were before you fell into our world like a boot to an anthill.

[[SFX: truck horn in background]]

SG: Helen, where are you calling from?

HP: I'm gone, Sally. I'm leaving! I've found a manager, for the singing. They're going to help me move away, set me up somewhere new.

SG: Where is that?

HP: That's not important. I have some things to put in order before I go, so I'll keep this brief, but I want you to promise something to me. If you ever considered me a friend, do this one thing for me.

SG: Helen, what do you want me to do?

HP: Just... Don't say anything. Don't tell him.

SG: Then why tell me?

HP: Because now you have to look him in the eye and lie to him. Lie to him about something he loves. Just like you made him do to me.

SG: ...That's harsh, Helen. That's... Cruel.

HP: Sally Grissom, you are the worst thing that ever happened to me.

[[SFX: Helen hangs up; radio tuning; a grandfather clock ticks; footsteps approach through the snow outside; the door opens and Anthony enters, removes his coat]]

AP: Honey! Merry Christmas! Why are all the lights off? Did we blow a fuse? Helen?

[[SFX: Anthony wanders through the empty house; he turns on a lamp]]

AP: Helen? I'm sorry. I know I was out late, I... I've been out late for too long. Helen! Sweetheart, are you here?

[[SFX: Anthony ascends the stairs, then runs back down]]

AP: No, no, no, no, she can't have done something so damn…

[[SFX: Anthony shoves the phone to the ground; the clock strikes the hour; Anthony throws a chair into the clock; he cries; radio tuning]]

SG: Diary of Sally Grissom, December 24, 1946. Part two, I guess. I just came down to the lab to check on the progress Partridge made with the APU, and he's not here. I couldn't get through when I called the house, so… I guess I'll just leave him a note? I could be overthinking this. I want to be. But really, I just want to stop thinking about them. About the whole Partridge Family Circus. I'm gonna leave a note with my radiation pulse theory on his desk, and I'm gonna spend Christmas Eve with friends. I think I get to have that, this time.

[[SFX: radio tuning; Bill in the late stages of sickness]]

BILL DONOVAN (BD): ...And, and we did- we will do- we did- Whickman will- are you? Are you? [etc]

HANK CORNISH (HC): Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. When did he get this bad?

CHET WHICKMAN (CW): You fellows certainly took your time putting this together.

HC: I don't much appreciate your tone, son. I told Bill it would be about a year, one year ago, almost to the day. You ever think that you just might be too close to this?

CW: I can't say that the question ever kept me up at night, sir. Too much else to do. And if I may speak frankly, sir?

HC: Go on.

CW: I would doubt the objectivity of anyone with this job, but it's been mine for years now. You wanna scrub this mission? That's within your rights. But I don't think that's going to happen.

HC: What makes you so sure?

CW: Because you're a practical man, who works for practical men. I know this operation top-to-bottom, and more importantly...

[[SFX: Chet places a box on the desk]]

CW: –I know where all the bodies are buried.

HC: What is this supposed to be?

[[SFX: Hank sifts through the box]]

CW: I can do one of two things, Agent Cornish: I can tear this whole thing down with a wrecking ball, or I can save it. Only one of those gets you a world you'd want to live in. The world he dreamed of.

HC: Goodness, look at the pair on you! Is that all?

[[SFX: Bill's coughing fit worsens; static distortion; Bill faints]]

HC: Bill!

CW: Son of a bitch.

HC: Agent Wells! Wells, get a medic in here, now!

CW: No! Agent Cornish, that won't help.

HC: The hell you mean?

CW: We know what we need to do now. We've always known.

[[SFX: radio tuning; a stretcher wheels Bill away; Anthony enters]]

AP: Officer Whickman! Was that the director? What the hell happened?

CW: What are you doing here, Doctor?

AP: Well, I was... I just came from the lab. Sally's left a note about the CAGE, about how information decays along the pattern of a tachyon pulse, whenever the Timepiece or any of its derivative tech is used. And it made me

think— information decay is exactly what's happened to Bill! The information in his head is decaying! I think, well, if we can put him in the CAGE, I think it's highly likely that we can halt, if not outright reverse, his symptoms. This is the best shot we've had so far!

CW: I'll take that under advisement and... schedule a demonstration as soon as possible. Excuse me Anthony, I've got to go.

[[SFX: Chet exits; Anthony peeks into the box]]

AP: What is this? "Donovan: October 28th, 1943." "Donovan/Grissom, January 44." "Donovan/Partridge-"... What the hell?

[[SFX: tape recorder stops]]

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ars PARADOXICA is created by Daniel Manning and Mischa Stanton.
Episode 09: Decay features -

Kristen DiMercurio (Sally Grissom)
Reyn Beeler (Chet Whickman)
Rob Slotnick (Bill Donovan)
Robin Gabrielli (Anthony Partridge)
Susanna Kavee (Helen Partridge)
Katie Speed (Esther Roberts)
Zach Ehrlich (Jack Wyatt)
Dan Anderson (Hank Cornish)
Billy Finn (Agent Nicholas Marsh)
with special thanks to Isabel Atkinson

Production help from Bryan Williams/Ark B. Original music by Mischa Stanton.
ars PARADOXICA is brought to you by the Internet: Have you tried turning it off and on again?

12 16 01 01 | 01 26 04 04 | 18 23 08 16 | 12 11 | 19 19 26
WEATHER: showers

10: Consequence, Act I

WRITTEN, DIRECTED & SOUND DESIGN BY MISCHA STANTON

[[SFX: tape recorder starts]]

BILL DONOVAN (BD): October 28th, 1943. People years down the line are gonna remember today. Like the Fourth of July. The day we dig our boot heels in. The day we take our first step taking Europe back from the Nazis, turning the tide in the Pacific, and ending this war once and for all. Today's the day we test out Project Rainbow.

When President Roosevelt named me Coordinator of Intelligence, he expected me to throw my weight around. He wanted me to be the bully on the playground. He wanted Wild Bill Donovan. But I guess ol' FDR hadn't caught on yet: This is the last war we will ever fight with bombs and guns and swords. War's moving into the shadows. They thought I was crazy when I wired the whole town of Polvo with microphones, but they won't be laughing when I've got dirt on everybody who's ever been within a three mile radius of that place. That's what they don't see. It won't matter who's got the biggest gun anymore. You don't fire until that perfect shot comes along, when the target's exactly where you want 'em, and then it all comes crumbling down. [fires an imaginary gun]

And how do I know this? This high school math teacher from Boston... Anthony Partridge. I called him a damn fool when I heard he'd barged into my New York office, shouting like Chicken Little at anyone who would listen. "The Japs are coming! The Japs are gonna hit us! The sky is falling, the sky is falling!" We brought him in for questioning, but turns out the guy didn't actually know anything! He said he'd run world events through some formula... What a laugh! I chucked the report to the bottom of the pile and sent him home.

Yeah well, that was October 1941, and by December I was done laughing. Turns out, Dr. Partridge was revolutionizing mathematics and event analysis and a whole bunch of other 10-cent words. It's called Predictive Mechanics. He told me the only way we were going to stay afloat was to boost our technology and our intelligence gathering, and fast. He said the Germans were developing rockets and thinking machines, super-soldiers and atomic bombs. I'd go to hell before I let myself get caught with my pants down like that again.

So I gave him access to all the resources at my disposal. I said, track down every scientist working on something new–something new and big. And we'll give them all the room they need to develop their work for us. I took just about everyone that I could keep my hands on. Mathematicians, chemists, physicists, engineers. Anybody working on the edge, the frontier. And I called it the Office of Developed Anomalous Resources: ODAR.

It took two years. Throwing science at the wall, to see what sticks. We poured money–a whole lotta money–into a little nowhere town in the Southwest. But we finally got what we're looking for: Project Rainbow.

[OBJ]I'm here in Philadelphia. They're due to touch down in a few hours. Leslie Groves, Robert Oppenheimer, Eisenhower, Harry Truman... Edgar Hoover. That smug bastard. He's been at Roosevelt's ear for months, telling him to shut me down. He's called Partridge's work a farce, called the boys in charge of the Rainbow project "loose powder kegs." Every time I reach up the ladder, his feet are stomping on my fingers. Well, he'll see. He'll see what I'm capable of today. I can't wait to rub his nose in it.

[[SFX: radio tuning; sounds of a harbor]]

BD: Victor Lambert, Ivan Maraczek, may I introduce you to Mr. J. Edgar Hoover, director of the FBI.

IVAN MARACZEK (IM): Pleased to meet you.

VICTOR LAMBERT (VL): A real honor, sir.

J. EDGAR HOOVER (JEH): I'm sure.

BD: These two are the minds behind what we're demonstrating today.

JEH: Making ships invisible to radar, is that right?

VL: Yes sir, that's right. You'll be able to sneak up on targets, observe the enemy unseen.

IM: The generator manipulates electromagnetic waves around an object by catalyzing—

JEH: What was your name again, son?

IM: I am Ivan Maraczek, sir.

JEH: Where're you from, Ivan Maraczek?

IM: Romania, Mr. Hoover.

VL: Listen buddy, if you've got something to say—

IM: Victor, be calm.

JEH: I do, as a matter of fact. I know your side and our side made a deal, but I'm not sure how much of this nation's future we should be placing in the hands of some flip-flopping Axis-power poindexter! How do we know this isn't some sort of a trick? Could very well be a bomb on that ship!

VL: All right, listen here, you pompous ass!–

BD: Dr. Lambert! You know, I think it might be a good idea if you took your seats. The demonstration is about to start.

[[SFX: Ivan leads Victor away]]

JEH: That boy's got quite the temper. You sure he's fit to be in the hot seat of your little operation? [laugh]

BD: That's good. Nice. Say anything in front of the brass to get me shut down. Why don't you at least let them see it before they decide to keep my offices running?

JEH: It's a waste of money and manpower, Bill. Your fancy gadgets aren't gonna beat the Germans. The only thing that'll give you the leg up is more boots on the ground. Roosevelt knows it, Eisenhower knows it, Truman sure as hell knows it. And once we get through this freak show, they won't have a problem telling you so either.

AMELIA: Alright everyone, the test is about to begin. Take your seats and put on your safety glasses.

BD: Just you wait and see.

JEH: It's only a matter of time, Bill.

[[SFX: everyone takes their seats; Bill walks up to a podium]]

BD: Good afternoon, gentlemen. You all know I've got a penchant for long-winded speeches—

[[SFX: the crowd laughs]]

BD: But I'm as anxious to see this test underway as you are. So I'll simply say this: What you see today is, without a doubt, the future of warfare in the modern age. Take it away.

AMELIA: Dockside to the Eldridge, come in Eldridge.

CHET WHICKMAN (CW): *(over radio)* Copy Dockside, engineering reports everything a-OK, all systems go. Permission to proceed.

AMELIA: Permission granted. Good luck, boys.

CW: Project Rainbow test commencing in ten, nine, eight, seven, six, five, four....

[[SFX: the signal drops]]

AMELIA: Hello? Eldridge we've lost you, come in Eldridge—

[[SFX: Project Rainbow activates in the distant harbor; all is silence; then, the world returns]]

JEH: I don't know about you boys, but I definitely saw that. Clear as day.

VL: Shut up! No, that isn't right. That's not what was supposed to happen—

AMELIA: Eldridge, come in Eldridge, what happened out there?

IM: Perhaps we miscalculated gravitational lens distribution—

BD: Get them back on comms.

[[SFX: static]]

AMELIA: I'm trying, sir. Come in, Eldridge!

CW: -ockside, Eldridge to Dockside. You're never gonna believe this... There's someone on the deck. Someone who wasn't there before... A woman.

[[SFX: radio tuning; Bill exits interrogation room on the Eldridge]]

CW: So... What did she say, sir?

BD: She's sticking to her story. The whole future nonsense. Says she's from the year 20[redacted].

CW: And... Do you believe her?

BD: Do you believe her, Officer...

CW: Whickman, sir. Petty Officer Chet Whickman.

BD: Did you believe her, Officer Whickman?

CW: ...I did, sir. I don't think anyone that... "out of sorts," has mind enough left to lie.

BD: She's got conviction, that's clear. She believes what she's saying. Which means she's either telling the truth, or tricked herself into believing it is. The perfect poker face. An essential skill for a spy.

CW: How can we know? Uh, sir.

BD: We can't. That's why you're gonna get rid of her.

CW: Uh... uh... Yes, sir.

BD: Say what you mean, son.

CW: I don't mean to question orders, sir.

BD: Speak freely, Officer Whickman. Please.

CW: Well, I just... She's not a threat, sir. She wasn't armed, wasn't doing anything but lying there when we found her. Probably knows about as much as we did about what happened. She's covered in her own sick and completely defenseless. It just doesn't feel right to shoot a helpless woman like that, sir.

BD: She appeared out of thin air, son. Out of the aether. She says she's from the future, I'll admit she's got a convincing argument. But if she had just appeared out of thin air, what makes you so sure she won't just disappear back into it again? Every second we waste talking about it is another second she's planning her escape. I just can't take that chance.

CW: I understand that, sir, but I think if she was going to run by now— if she could have run by now, she would have. And while we've got her here...

BD: Go on, Petty Officer.

CW: Recruit her, sir. Whatever she's done, however she got here... It's something real clever. Something high-tech, right? Like you guys were doing with the ship. And whatever she's got, it sounds like she's the one who invented it. That's what she claims, anyway. I think if she really knows some high-level stuff it could only help us, right? And if she doesn't... well, then I guess you wasted a week or so.

BD: Recruit her...

CW: It's just an idea, sir.

BD: Not a bad one. Not bad at all... Tell me, Chet, how would you like a new assignment?

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

BD: –you won't regret this, John— yeah, I know. It's a large chunk of change, but the OSS budget has some definite wiggle room. Okay, okay. I know. Thanks. Yeah, you too. Okay. Goodbye.

[[SFX: Bill hangs up phone; Sally storms in]]

SALLY GRISSOM (SG): Okay Donovan, what the hell?!

BD: Dr. Grissom, what do I owe the pleasure—

SG: You can shove it, Donovan.

BD: You know, you really can't talk to me like that.

SG: Why'd you do it?

BD: Do what?

SG: You've... ordered me into solitary confinement! I don't know why you can't just trust me that I'm not going to leak future secrets, or whatever. I told you I wouldn't say a word. But no! You think I'm just gonna take this?!

BD: Sally, I—

SG: It took me a while to catch on, you know. First the tech staff, then it was the commissary workers, the switchboard girls, the calculators—

BD: Sally! What are you talking about?

SG: Why did you order the entire town of Polvo to stop talking to me?

BD: I didn't!

SG: You... You didn't?

BD: Of course not! That's an awful idea. Why on Earth would I order the people you're supposed to be working with to give you the silent treatment?

SG: I... Um...

BD: Try to play nice with the other children, Dr. Grissom.

SG: Yeah... Will do.

[[SFX: Sally exits; Bill buzzes intercom.]]

BD: Amelia, can you call Dr. Partridge in?

[[SFX: tape fast-forward]]

ANTHONY PARTRIDGE (AP): You wanted to see me, sir?

BD: Anthony, you gotta give Sally Grissom a break.

AP: Wh.... What do you mean?

BD: Don't play that with me. You've been badmouthing the girl behind her back to the rest of Polvo. It's childish and it's getting in the way of progress.

AP: Oh yeah, who's progress are we talking about, Bill–

BD: Her progress, Anthony. I told you. It's her progress I'm putting my money on just now. And you can either take it personally and pout like a jilted lover, or you can be a man and get to work. Which one is it gonna be?

AP: But come on Bill, this isn't fair—

BD: Which. One. Is it gonna be?

[[Anthony is silent]]

BD: Good choice. The first call for volunteers she puts out, you're on her team. Do I make myself clear?

AP: Yes sir.

BD: You'll see. Once you get to know her, she not that–

[[SFX: Anthony slams the door]]

BD: [sigh]

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

BD: Bill. Hi. Yes, it's you. You need to listen to me, very carefully. This isn't a joke. Or a hoax. Your father is Timothy and your mother is Tish. You took a piece of shrapnel in the Belgian countryside and you still can't feel anything in that spot above your left hip. It makes you worry that something's still wrong with it, even though it's been that way for decades and you're probably fine... Hmm. Yeah. The date— my date, is August 1st, 1945. I know, that day hasn't happened yet. Are you putting it together yet? Good.

If my Whickman gets the tape to Polvo and he can figure out how to work that damn machine, you'll be listening to this on the morning of July 10th. I won't bore you with the details, I suppose you'll find out soon enough. Your Oversight Committee is coming in from Trinity in a few days. The Timepiece isn't ready, and it won't be before they get there. Anthony Partridge, in his infinite bitter wisdom, has abducted Sally Grissom and her entire group to run off to Las Vegas, Nevada for the weekend. The Committee's gonna try to shut you down.

I know you're angry. You're frustrated. You wanna fight back. I know. That's what I did. You're not gonna do that. Here's what you're gonna do instead.

Let them have their weekend. It's not gonna matter either way. Sally's right: it's just damn hard to show someone how the Timepiece works. It's not flashy, it's no A-bomb. Instead, you're gonna call up Edgar Hoover, and you're gonna tell him you've gotten in contact with a certain New York businessman named John Monroe. See, I did a little digging around. I found Mr. Monroe, and he was in possession of some... Rather intimate details about our Mr. Hoover. Really rather shocking, rather vivid details of his encounters with our mutual enemy.

Yes, that's right my friend: J Edgar Hoover is a homosexual. [laugh] Go ahead, enjoy it for a moment.

Now, call Hoover, and tell him about Mr. Monroe. Unless he wants what Mr. Monroe knows to get out, he'll throw his weight behind you. He's gonna

throw the file he has on you back in your ␣face. Bill, trust me: Don't worry about it. He doesn't have as much on you as he thinks. He doesn't realize that you don't have anything to lose.

It's a solid plan, I promise. I've had a couple weeks to think it over. He's not going to want to lose his power just to take you down with him. And as long as he puts his word behind the Timepiece, the Committee will fall in line. He won't thank you for it, so watch your back, but if we were a betting man—and I know we are—I'd wager he'll do his part.

Today I'm in a run-down motel. The bed squeaks and the molding has teeth-marks in it. But as soon as this tape gets to you, I'll be back where I belong. You will, I mean. Guess that Timepiece is pretty useful after all.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

BD: *(on tape)* ...Guess that Timepiece is pretty useful after all.

[[SFX: tape stops]]

BD: That's all of it.

CW: And, where did you say you found this sir?

BD: It just... appeared here. I was at my desk, I turned around, and when I looked back, there it was. It's genuine, son, that much is clear. But I'm not sure what to make of it.

CW: Well sir... Assuming that what you said on the recording is true... It sounds like a solid enough plan. It's hard for me to believe there's nothing we could say to the Committee that might make them see it our way, but you sounded pretty certain there wasn't anything that could be done about it. But I guess, if you had Hoover in your corner, knowing how much he dislikes you... That might be enough to convince President Truman to tip the scales.

BD: We'd have to slow down operations regardless.

CW: Oh no doubt. Probably most of the town, I'm guessing. We might only have enough—

BD: — enough for the Timepiece group.

CW: Exactly, sir. Is that enough?

BD: ...See this? This is only the beginning. If I can warn myself ahead of time, of any danger... This is all we'll need. The rest will come in time. Chet, I want you to tail them to Vegas. Jack Wyatt's got a big mouth, and the last thing I need is a gang of reporters poking their noses around Polvo. Get me Brooks, his team just finished a project, and a copy of the Timepiece schematic. Redact anything that ties it to Sally's team. I want a backup

Timepiece up and running in a month. As for me, it looks like I've gotta give Mr. Hoover a call.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

BD: Tape 2, send date July 17, 1945, aiming for July 10th. This is after I've received Tape 1, so I hope I listen to that one before this one. The intel on Hoover was sound. The fairy came through, spoke to Truman for us, but whatever he said wasn't convincing enough. When you call him this time, make sure to impress upon him exactly how convincing he should be. And if it doesn't work... I guess we'll keep trying until it does.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

BD: Tape 5, send date July 26, 1945, aiming for July 18th. Churchill lost the election. Hell, it's not even close. Not quite sure how he managed to muck it up so thoroughly... You better call in that favor he owes us, sooner rather than later.

[[SFX: radio tuning; quiet static distortion]]

BD: Tape 7, send date August 10, 1945, aiming for August 4th. Truman didn't go for it. He went and begged the Soviets for help. Either way, they're not gonna break their pact with Japan unless Truman commits to the second bomb. The last tape was no lie, Japan did not take Little Boy lying down. Tell Truman to get his head out of his ass. He already dropped one bomb, what's one more?

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

BD: Tape 12, or... I guess 12. September 12th, 1945. I came across an unlabeled tape. Not sure exactly when it's from, so nuts to trying to keep these things in order, but it's a recording of Chet Whickman confronting Quentin Barlowe, one of the cryptologists working in Predictive Mechanics for Anthony Partridge. Sounds like Barlowe is some sort of criminal agent, spying on us for... Someone. It's not really clear. Gotta get Whickman to look into it. Maybe update security clearance for the whole operation... Weed out anyone else stupid enough to try to break into Wild Bill Donovan's town.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

BD: Tape 16, send date December 3rd, 1945, aiming for November 28th. The new Central Intelligence office is coming together. They sent a man to inspect Polvo today, his name's Cornish–Hank. Seemed like a decent sort of guy. Very interested in what the Timepiece can do. Could be an ally. [sniff]

[[SFX: static distortion]]

BD: I was cold with him, but I'd like you to try the meeting again. Befriend the guy. I think we won't regret it.

[[SFX: radio]]

BD: Tape 19, send date December 12th, 1945, aiming for the 11th. I'm in a hospital in DC. Some idiot ran a red light and broadsided me on the corner of 9th Ave and F Street. I've got a broken collarbone, punctured lung, and my left arm's basically a loose collection of bone shards. Just... Keep an eye out, would ya?

[[SFX: radio tuning; static distortion]]

BD: Tape 20, send date December 12th, 1945, aiming for the 11th again. In the hospital. Again, I guess. Waiting at the light doesn't work. Bastard rear-ended me right into the middle of the intersection. Maybe next time try a different route?

[[SFX: radio tuning; static distortion]]

BD: Tape 21. Reschedule the meeting. Make them come to you. Stay off the goddamned road.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

BD: Tape 26. Tell her, dammit. For God's sake, tell her what she means to you.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

BD: Tape 29, send date December 21st, 1945, aiming for December 20th. Mr. Cornish came back to town today. He told me that he pled my case to the Committee as hard as he could for the Timepiece project, but they've decided to shut us down anyway...

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

HANK CORNISH (HC): I'm sorry Bill, I really am, but without something I can show them it's a pretty hard sell!

BD: Come on! He's been fine to let us have the run of the place for four years!

HC: That was before the bomb, Bill! That was before they won the damn war!

BD: Hah! "Won the war?" That's funny. Beat the Germans and the Japs, sure, but the real war's just getting started.

HC: Don't I know it. And I know that your Timepiece project's the key to it all. But it's not something I can put in their hands and show it to them.

BD: Hmm. Let me work something up.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

BD: Tape 30, December 21st, 1945. Hank Cornish has agreed to announce that we're shutting down the town at the Christmas party. If all goes as planned, a certain "loose powder keg" tied to the remnants of Project Rainbow might be tempted to… take drastic action.

[[SFX: radio tuning; static distortion]]

BD: Tape 31. December 21st. Maraczek took the bait, Rainbow Station A is history. Gotta send this quick before Sally starts changing things.

[[SFX: radio tuning; static distortion]]

BD: Tape 32. Sally's gone to stop Rainbow Station A from exploding. I've got eyes on her still inside the Christmas party, but Cornish still isn't convinced. Gotta try something else. [cough]

[[SFX: radio tuning; static distortion]]

BD: Tape 33. Lambert. You hotheaded beautiful son of a bitch. While Sally was fixing one station, he went and blew up the other one. But Sally was there to stop him. Another Sally. This is it. Our opportunity. Make sure Cornish is there to meet Sally at Station A, and you make sure to meet the other Sally at Station B. This oughta show him. One more time.

[[SFX: radio tuning; static distortion]]

TWO SALLY GRISSOMS: Is that—aaagh...

[[SFX: static distortion]]

HC: Dr. Grissom, are you all right?

BD: Is that enough physical evidence for you?

HC: Get a medic in here!

BD: Get the funding.

HC: What? Donovan, get—

BD: Say you'll get the funding.

HC: Jesus Christ, are you insane?

BD: I'm running out of time. And so is she. Get. The. Funding.

HC: Fine! Yes, okay? I'll get you your damn funding! But it's a moot point without her so get out of my way!

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

BD: One year. We've got one year in a tiny little town in Colorado. One year before Central Intelligence straps an iron collar around my neck. I may have come on a little strong to Hank Cornish, but... I did what what I have to do. Have to—Had to do.

[[SFX: static distortion]]

BD: [clears throat] One year in the game, it's barely enough time to do anything. Of course...I have a lot more time than CI thinks. Better get to work.

[[SFX: radio tuning; buzzer]]

SECRETARY: Mayor Harding, your 10 o'clock is here.

MAYOR HARDING (MH): *(on intercom)* Send him in.

BD: Thank you darling.

[[SFX: Bill adjusts the microphone; door opens, Bill enters]]

BD: Mayor Harding, Bill Donovan. Nice to meet you.

MH: Pleasure, Mr. Donovan. What can I do you for?

BD: Well, as you know I've just moved in with my team.

MH: Yes, I spoke with your colleague, Agent Cornish. Moving into the old Roebuck mill, on the south edge of town, is that right?

BD: Yes sir, and thanks for that building, it'll do us just fine I think. Just fine.

MH: Well, is there something else I can do for you then, Mr. Donovan?

BD: As a matter of fact, there is. We're going to need to run a significant amount of power through your mill here. Quite a bit of it, actually. Your one power plant may not exactly cover it. I've brought with me here the plans for—

MH: Plans? Mr. Donovan, the electrical needs of our little town here are pretty slight. Ain't had a need for much more than that. What you're talking about is ripping up half the town's copper lines—

BD: More than half, actually. You're going to need to tear up Elm Street, Baker Street, and this entire stretch of road leading back into the valley. I understand that's a major route in and out of town, so we'll need a bypass—

MH: Mr. Donovan, you're talking about a project calling for three or four crews, working at top speed for a month here. Diverting traffic around Elm

alone would be a goddamned nightmare! How're you planning to pay for all this? Your office must have one hell of a budget—

BD: Actually, Mr. Mayor, you're going to fund it.

MH: [laugh] Is that right?

BD: Damn right. Unless you want your constituents to find out about the how you stabbed your friend and colleague in the back to get where you are today...

MH: They already know, Mr. Donovan! I made it very public during my campaign. Didn't want any secrets, so men like you couldn't bully me into anything! Is there something legal and reasonable I can do for you, Mr. Donovan? Before you use up what little good will you have left in this office?

BD: Yes... This doesn't seem to have convinced you, has it.

MH: [laugh] It would seem not, sir!

BD: I guess I'll just have to try again.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

MH: Mr. Donovan, the electrical needs of our little town here are pretty slight, ain't had a need for much more than that—

BD: I'm sitting on the technology that will revolutionize this century and the next. And if it's all coming from here, if you agree to subsidize... You could stand to make a tidy profit, Mr. Mayor.

MH: Sir! I don't know what kind of man you think I am, but I will not be bought off by a bully like yourself!

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

MH: Mr. Donovan, the electrical needs of our little town here are pretty slight. Ain't had a need for much more than that–

BD: You could string the whole place up in lights. It'll be a marvel, a great attraction! "The Shining City on the Hill!" Think of the money you'll bring to town.

MH: A flood of fat cats and city slickers come on holiday... Destroy the peace in Point-of-Exile. You and I have very different ideas of what's good for this town.

[[SFX: radio tuning; static distortion; sounds of a struggle]]

BD: SIGN IT! SIGN THE PAPERS, DAMMIT!

MH: Unhand me, Mr. Donovan!

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

CW: Sir, what is it you want? I don't understand.

BD: I want you to start taking funds and putting them into rebuilding the electrical grid in this little town in Colorado. We'll have moving there— moved there... In two years' time we'll be there and it needs to be make... Making... Have to be made ready.

[[SFX: static distortion; radio tuning]]

BD: [coughs]

CW: Sir, why don't you sit down.

BD: Dammit Chet, I was fine! I... I am fine! I will be fine. I... You needed to— need to talk to... Talked to... Gonna talk—

CW: I know, sir, I know. I've gotta talk to Jack Wyatt, he's liable to get them all killed if he keeps on—

BD: No! Don't you see? He knows we're coming. And he knows we know, we knew, we will know all the plans, and— [coughing fit]

CW: Sir, maybe you really ought to—

BD: Whickman, you need to plan. Plan for everything. Everything you think of, every contingency. He's got some way around. We've been... Will be, we will be... We've got be ready for him, ready for him...

CW: [sighs]

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

CW: Director Donovan's condition is getting worse and worse every day. His speech, it's like he's not even speaking sentences anymore... Just strings of words! I'm still following the plan he left for us, but... It's on me now. It's all on me!

HC: Calm down, son. That's why I'm here. I'm here to work out the next steps.

CW: Well, it seems to me that everyone on this team's just decided that the Timepiece isn't important enough to focus on, sir.

HC: And you've told them that whatever they accomplish by the end of the year is forfeit, right?

CW: It's not going to make a difference, sir. They're not horses, we can't just whip 'em till they run faster. We've got… We've got to come at it from another angle.

HC: What do you think?

CW: Well… Director Donovan had some ideas. He said we've got to reel them back in. Get Wyatt off the sauce and back in the lab. Alleviate the pressure that Helen Partridge is putting on her husband to choose between her and his work.

HC: And to get Dr. Grissom involved?

CW: Sally's a special case, sir. We don't want to push her. She's a valuable asset, and the closer she gets to the project... Well, the higher the chance is that she'll end up in the same condition as Bill.

HC: Yes, I've seen it. We wouldn't want that.

CW: Isn't there anything you can do? Buy us more time?

HC: What do you think I've been doing, son? I'm at the end of my rope! I've let you all have your year, but that window is closing. And someone's gotta take charge here or it's all gonna come crumbling down. And if you're not going to—

CW: I can handle it, sir.

HC: Then handle it!

CW: The problems are Wyatt and Partridge. We need to get Jack some support—someone outside of our office. He doesn't trust a word we say. It's gotta be someone he's found on his own… [snaps] He's got a girl I can talk to, she'll get him back on track!

HC: And the Partridges?

CW: I'm not sure there's anything Mrs. Partridge would love more than to see her husband out of the game. If we're gonna keep Anthony Partridge around, she's gotta get gone.

HC: Leave her to me then. Not bad, Mr. Whickman. Not bad at all.

[[SFX: radio tuning; a crowd exits the club]]

HC: Ms. Partridge, can I speak with you a moment?

HELEN PARTRIDGE (HP): Um, sure. By the way, it's Mrs.—

HC: My mistake, Mrs. Partridge. I just caught your set. You have a simply beautiful voice.

HP: Why, thank you, Mr.—

HC: Oh, forgive me, my name Harry Conway, I'm with Conway, Stevens & Rice. We're a talent agency based in Los Angeles. I got a call from a buddy of mine who was passing through town a couple weeks back, told me that I have just got to see Helen Partridge singing up on that stage! And I gotta tell you ma'am, my buddy was not wrong. Not wrong one bit.

HP: Oh my— you're... You're not serious. In this little podunk hamlet?

HC: Oh but I am Mrs. Partridge, one hundred percent! I'd like to offer you a chance to sing for our company. We'll get you set up in California, bring you in, record a few tracks, and who knows, maybe you have a contract somewhere—

HP: Mr. Conway, please! I appreciate your offer, but... Gosh, I mean, California?

HC: Don't let the big city scare you Mrs. Partridge—can I call you Helen? Helen, I tell ya, you come out with me and you'll be a star!

HP: ...No, no, I'm sorry, I couldn't. This is just a little hobby. I–I live here, my husband—

HC: Is your husband here, Helen? Can I speak with him, perhaps?

HP: He, um... N-no, he wasn't here tonight...

HC: Oh. Well, then maybe I can speak to him another night?

HP: You'd have to come and see us at home then, Mr. Conway. My husband hasn't come to see me perform.

HC: That's... Well that's quite a shame. He's missing something special. Listen, Helen. I know it's a lot to think about. It would mean giving up all the good things you've got here, your quiet mountain life with your husband, all your friends in town here. But if you want my advice, it'd be a shame to let a voice like yours waste away.

[[SFX: Hank pulls out a business card]]

HC: Here. Take my card, take some time to... think things over. It's an open offer. If you ever want to come sing for us, all you have to do is call. Have a good night, Mrs. Partridge.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

CW: Excuse me, miss, are you Penelope Wise?

PENNY WISE (PW): Um, can I help you?

CW: Hi, you might remember me? I work with Jack Wyatt.

PW: Oh, yes, you're uh... that security guy. Sorry, Mr...

CW: His performance has been slipping lately.

PW: I'm sorry?

CW: Don't worry, it's not your fault. In fact, you're going to help me fix it.

PW: Now, I don't think—

CW: He took a hit, a few months back. It's left him shaken. Seems to have led him to a bit of... Excess. Reckless behavior. I just need you to make sure he's okay.

PW: Listen here, Mr. Spook. I don't know what your game is. But what I do or not do with the people I care about is precisely none of your damn business! Jack is close to me, and I don't much like being harassed by strangers come round asking 'bout them's close to me—

CW: Your father.

PW: My... father?

CW: Ethan Wise. Owns a cattle ranch about a mile outside of town? Seems like he's missed a few mortgage payments here or there. You know... I could help you out with that.

PW: ...What do you want?

CW: Just help him. We want Jack happy and healthy, bright-eyed and bushy-tailed when he comes in in the mornings. Keep his mind clear of troubles and full of sweet thoughts. Give him something to come home to at the end of the day. Ease him off the drink. Just be yourself, Miss Wise, and I'm sure everyone will get what they want.

PW: Anything else I can do for you?

CW: No ma'am–

PW: –Great. Can I go now?

CW: Of course.

[[SFX: Penny walks away]]

CW: Thanks for your cooperation, ma'am!

[[SFX: radio tuning; static distortion]]

BD: This is bound to be my last recording... It's December 15th... Or, the 18th... 10th? I... I don't know anymore. It's December 1946, I'm pretty sure. I can't keep the days straight in my head. I can feel myself slipping... The attacks are more frequent, I lose track of my... Some days I spend an hour just repeating words over and over and just repeating words over and over and just repeating—... I don't know. I don't know what I'm saying anymore. Dammit Partridge, you were supposed to figure this out! You could have had it all! Why will you can't figure this out?

[[SFX: static distortion increases; Bill coughs]]

This is it. I know this is it. I've gotta... Whickman. He has to run things for me now.

Chet. Listen. Don't lose heart. Keep them working. They're so close, and I... If they figure it out, even after I die, you can still save me. You send the plans for the finished model back to me, before I—

[[SFX: a box drops onto the desk; static distortion recedes]]

Hah... Haha! Speak of the devil. There it is. The tapes, the blueprints for a... Looks like some kind of a, a room set up with a Timepiece in it and a...Hah! The CAGE, huh? Oh, Partridge you beautiful bastard, I knew you will— knew you... Know you'll figure it out!

[[SFX: Bill dials the phone; static distortion]]

BD: Whickman! Back here, get back here now. We've done it. Willan have done it. I've gotten the... Partridge, he's gonna have finished— or... [[coughs]] will have had finished—Rrrgh... Partridge, he got—getting closer to— he's already, and will have sent along... Will... Have will send... Aaaagh! He has will sending...

[[SFX: Bill coughs; drops the phone; faints]]

CW: *(over the phone)* Don't worry, sir. I'm on my way. I won't let you down.

[[SFX: tape recorder stops]]

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ars PARADOXICA was created by Daniel Manning and Mischa Stanton.
Episode 10: Consequence, Act I features –

Rob Slotnick (Bill Donovan)
Reyn Beeler (Chet Whickman)
Kristen DiMercurio (Sally Grissom)
Robin Gabrielli (Anthony Partridge)
Susanna Kavee (Helen Partridge)

Charlotte Mary Wen (Penny Wise)
Dan Anderson (Hank Cornish)
Isabel Atkinson (Amelia Arnault)
Julian Mundy (Ivan Maraczek)
Eric Rafael Ibarra (Victor Lambert)
Pete Lutz (J. Edgar Hoover)
Amanda Bailey (additional voices)

Original music by Mischa Stanton.
ars PARADOXICA is brought to you by The Internet: Recording your every thought since January 1970.

06 15 11 15 11 | 22 15 09 | 02 21 04 | 08 18 26 18 | 12 11
WEATHER: clear

10: Consequence, Act II

WRITTEN BY DANIEL MANNING
DIRECTED & SOUND DESIGN BY MISCHA STANTON

[[SFX: tape recorder starts]]

[[SFX: Bill and Chet on recorder; Bill coughs, falls]]

CHET WHICKMAN (CW): Don't worry sir. I'm on my way. I won't let you down.

[[SFX: empty tape spins in recorder]]

ANTHONY PARTRIDGE (AP): You have got the be kidding me… Donovan! Donovan, where the HELL are you!...

[[SFX: Anthony stomps out, slams door; radio tuning]]

SALLY GRISSOM (SG): Diary of Sally Grissom, December 25th, 1946. You know, last night I was really feeling the Yuletide spirit, what with figuring out the APU signal decay, but after talking to Helen Partridge, I'm not so sure. Christmas is supposed to be this wonderful time to come together with family and exchange shiny baubles. But standing on the outside of those traditions, it's hard not to feel left out in the cold. I mean, not literally, but yeah, sure. Literally. There's an emptiness to the holiday that-

[[SFX: CAGE activates.]]

SG: Uh... there's not supposed to be a CAGE here. Ohmygod, what's going on, HEY—

FUTURE SALLY GRISSOM (FSG): Calm down, Sally. It's gonna be okay.

SG: Oh... You're...

FSG: Yep.

SG: But you're—

FSG: Yes.

SG: You're me! From the future!

FSG: [sigh] Okay, let's get this out of the way. Yes, hi, I'm you. From the future. You're thinking of the number 86, you're gonna hold your middle finger behind your back, the password is Nitric Caiman Grout.

SG: ...Why 86?

FSG: It’s what we always pick.

SG: Well isn’t that just... wizard.

FSG: Enough time-horsing around. We gotta talk.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

[[SFX: hospital devices; Anthony barges through the door]]

AP: Bill Donovan, you dirty piece of... What... What is all this?

BILL DONOVAN (BD): Anthony, it’s been... so long. So long.

AP: What is all this? What’s going on?

BD: This is my treatment. Sally’s CAGE... it gives your mind time to stop and think things through. I’m healing.

AP: So... You’ve been in the CAGE?

BD: Controlled exposure therapy. It’s working... slowly. From what I understand, I have you to thank.

AP: I only had the idea for all of this an hour ago.

BD: And in another version of events, you were too late to save my life.

AP: Well I guess “too late” isn’t an obstacle for you any more. How long have you been in there?

BD: Quite a while. I’m not really sure of the numbers. Does duration even matter without a clock to measure it?

AP: –Guess.

BD: The last time I spoke with you was... Something like thirty years ago.

AP: And it’s working?

BD: My head’s clearer than it’s ever been since the day Sally Grissom appeared in my life.

AP: Since you started fucking with time travel and and had your goons manipulate my wife into leaving me.

BD: [sigh] This isn’t a social call then.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

SG: This isn't happening. This shouldn't be happening. I can't believe this is happening—

FSG: Dammit Grissom, get a hold of yourself!

SG: [laughs]

[[SFX: Future Sally slaps Sally]]

FSG: Sally Virginia Grissom, keep it together!

SG: ...Mom only used to use our middle name when she was furious.

FSG: Yeah, I know. Doesn't matter. We don't have time for nostalgia. Ha ha, yes, time travel sure is complicated and funny, right{?} I know you've got a million questions, make it fast.

SG: When are you from?

FSG: Twenty years ahead. 1967.

SG: Do we ever make it back to the future?

FSG: [groans]

SG: The real future. Our future.

FSG: That place is gone. Ceased to exist the second we stepped foot into the 40s... But I did hold a couple Enchantment Under the Sea dances when the 50s swung around, so...

SG: Did you ever play [Johnny B Goode]—

FSG: Come on. We're not that bad, are we?

SG: I dunno. I'm starting to get why some people don't like us.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

AP: You ruined my life! You blackmailed the director of the FBI, and the President!

BD: Well, Anthony, we've all done things we regret.

AP: You "regret" turning my wife against me?

BD: I needed you focused. That woman was dragging you down.

AP: Oh, I wasn't focused enough! Now you care about what I do? Now I'm the valuable asset?

BD: You know what they say about making omelettes. Progress requires sacrifice, Anthony. That's why you never got anywhere. You never sacrificed anything. Never fought for anything.

AP: I fought for her.

BD: Did you? From where I sit, it looks like you left Helen to wither on the vine. She played the doting homemaker for years, waiting and praying that one day, her love would return from the war.

AP: I did those things for you!

BD: In part, I'm sure. But don't kid yourself: you did what you did for you. For your ego. To make you feel important. And when you neglected her, Helen chose to leave. You lost her on your own.

AP: What is so broken inside you, that you can manipulate people's lives like this?

BD: You are a cog in a machine, Anthony. An important cog, but a cog nonetheless. A cog in a glorious machine that makes the world spin faster around Uncle Sam's axis. Don't you have any love for God and country?

AP: You're not doing this for America, you're doing this for yourself. For your own twisted claim to power.

BD: That's hogwash. Everything I did, I did for this nation.

AP: You can cut the bullshit, Bill. I heard the tapes. You've never been concerned about anyone but yourself.

BD: I've given my life…! The only reason you're not slowly wasting away teaching calculus to adolescents is because of me. If you've heard my tapes–and if you have, someone is definitely fired–then you know what I've given up for this work.

AP: Sally's work. I'm just the cog. Remember? Remember before Philadelphia, before all this blew up? We were going to change the world.

BD: Plans change. Assets have to be reorganized. Not everyone gets to be the hero. You were a very useful employee, Anthony. I'm sorry that your wife left you. I hope that these acknowledgments give you the validation that you so desperately desire.

AP: That's all you have to say?

BD: I think so. And if you could finish this up, I've got to

[[SFX: Anthony chokes Bill. Chet enters.]]

CHET WHICKMAN (CW): Director Donov—... Oh... Oh Anthony. Anthony! What have you done?

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

SG: How and why are we in this CAGE?

FSG: I sprang for the deluxe Timepiece Field Kit.

SG: ...That? That's a Timepiece?

FSG: You got it.

SG: It's so small!

FSG: The miracles of modern science. They make it smaller. Ask the important questions.

SG: Okay, okay! Why are we talking in a CAGE instead of, like, a normal room?

FSG: We have to be in a CAGE to keep our brains from turning to mush.

SG: ...Run that back by me again?

FSG: Cliffsnotes: time travel paradoxes are bad for the head. They make you go crazy. The literature doesn't exist for you yet, but it'll be called "Butterfly Syndrome."

SG: They really named it after the Heinlein story?

FSG: It's actually a chaos theory metaphor, but sure, that's on-theme.

SG: I'm definitely understanding the animosity.

FSG: Listen kid, you need to hear me on this. When this CAGE turns off and you flash back to real time? It's gonna go very badly for you.

SG: Why?

FSG: What's the weirdest time travel event you can think of?

SG: Based on context I'm assuming it's talking face-to-face with your future self about events that haven't happened yet.

FSG: Give the girl a prize. Yes. The sheer impossibility of it all gives you the migraine of a lifetime.

SG: What you're saying is the Timepiece causes brain damage?

FSG: You thought it was safe? Hell no it... messes you up big time.

SG: And we're in the CAGE because...?

FSG: It treats it, or something. I guess. I don't know, dammit. I'm a physicist, not a brain surgeon. Going theory in the 60s is that since it's a safe space in here, your brain can sort of anchor itself. The CAGE keeps you stable. Stable-ish, which is why we need to hurry. Donovan should be doing it himself right about now.

SG: Donovan?

FSG: Oh, this is... Spoiler alert: Donovan's been abusing the Timepiece for his own gains.

SG: Come on! Seriously?! I speechified! A bunch of times!

FSG: Yes, and he didn't listen. Point is, when we're done chatting, the CAGE is going to dissolve, you've got about three seconds to process what's happened, and then you... probably won't die.

SG: Probably?

FSG: And after you... definitely probably don't die, you'll never see me again.

SG: Aww, what?? Come on, we were just starting to–

FSG: I'm gone after this, Sally. Don't waste it.

[[SFX: radio tuning; mic hidden in the lining of a suitcase; motel room door opens; Jack and Penny shuffle inside; Jack shuts the door, locks it, opens the suitcase.]]

PENNY WISE (PW): –think we'll be safe here?

JACK WYATT (JW): Long enough to shower and sleep, at least.

PW: How far do you think we'll need to go?

[[SFX: Jack takes out a map]]

JW: We're about 25 miles north of [redacted]. We can make it out of [redacted] and through [redacted] and [redacted] tomorrow.

PW: Do you think they know we left?

JW: I'm not sure. They'll have figured it out by morning, of course, but now I–

[[SFX: phone rings]]

PW: Do we pick it up?

JW: Who would be calling here?

PW: Who do you think? I'm scared, Jack.

JW: It's...

PW: What?

JW: I was about to say "it's gonna be okay," but it's not, Penny. It's really not gonna be okay.

[[SFX: Jack picks up phone.]]

JW: Yes?

ESTHER ROBERTS (ER): (on phone) Jack.

JW: Esther.

ER: I wanted to—

JW: How did you find us?

ER: You... You know what they can do.

JW: What you can do? If they think they can use you to bring me back in, they're dead wrong.

ER: I wouldn't let them.

JW: Then... Then why are you calling?

ER: Because I owe it to you. I told them you were going east. Towards the Carolinas. Said I knew you always wanted to live there.

JW: Thanks for the heads up.

ER: Everything's about to change around here.

JW: We never should have worked for a man like Bill Donovan.

ER: It doesn't matter now. We made our choices.

JW: And you chose to side with the snake in the grass.

ER: You made perfect the enemy of good and chose to run away from a chance to put them on the least destructive path. Don't kid yourself into thinking everything's so black and white.

JW: Don't give me this "ends justify" bullshit. You wanted power, and you got it. So I hope you're happy. I hope somebody's happy.

ER: I can't say you're totally wrong.

JW: You're getting better at their doubletalk every day.

ER: I want you and Penny to be free of this. You of all people deserve it.

JW: It... thank you.

ER: This is the best I can do for you: after I hang up, open your trunk. Check under the lining on the left side.

JW: Give Sally my best. And Anthony. Tell them... tell them never to stop being the good ones. ER: I will. I love you, Jack.

JW: I love you too, Esther.

[[SFX: Jack hangs up.]]

PW: What did she say? PW: Jack, what did she say?

[[SFX: Jack opens the suitcase; he fumbles around the nylon lining; he pulls out the small recorder, and crushes it; radio tuning]]

SG: Why did you come all this way? What terrible thing could possibly justify jumping back twenty years on your own timeline?

FSG: I'd love to answer every question you have, and god damn do I know how frustrating this will be...

[[SFX: static distortion]]

FSG: ...is… dammit, it's starting to sink in. I've really only got time to hit the broad strokes. The CAGE can only sustain us–this–for so long.

SG: Classic. The one person I trust to give me a straight answer, and she has a time limit.

FSG: Alright. So. You'll never see Anthony Partridge again.

SG: What?

FSG: They disappear him. I'd say he was dead, but you never say never with these guys. I've heard rumors of... never mind.

SG: What if I could–

FSG: You can't. Save him. Believe me, I tried. Sally, I tried. We tried. You have to trust me. It's not worth it. Point is, I went on the run after that, but never for too long. They know where you go–they just ask the future. They know where you've been–they look in the past. I spent years swimming

against their tide, going nowhere. I probably made them even stronger in the process.

SG: So you're giving up?

FSG: Not exactly. They–Whickman–never wanted to imprison me, they just... wanted our brain. SG: All the boys do.

FSG: And, it might've took me a long time to realize this, and I really don't want to give you the wrong impression here, but... they're not bad people. Misguided, certainly but... you know Whickman. He cares. He wants to help people. He always has.

SG: Whickman? What about Donovan?

FSG: As of today, you don't need to worry about Bill Donovan. Whickman's taking over operations.

SG: And you want me to... work with them?

FSG: Sally, you have one thing all these others don't: you've seen the future. You've seen the intelligence state of 20[redacted]. You can stop them going down that route. They trust you. More than anyone else.

SG: Can I? Can we?

FSG: I spent decades running from the Office of Developed Anomalous Whatever, and by the end I didn't know why I kept going. I'm tired of being a fugitive.

[[SFX: static distortion]]

FSG: Your nose is bleeding. We need to finish this now before we die in here. Bad things are coming, Grissom. The history that we remember is different. Everything that's happened since 1943... it's created ripples. Deviations. If I had had access to their resources, maybe I could've been able to do something. But there was... it doesn't matter what [redacted]happened. You can help them where I couldn't. But you've got to start the relationship with an open hand, not a closed fist.

SG: What bad things happened?

FSG: There will... there was… there is...

[[SFX: static distortion]]

FSG: I can't keep up. I can't say the words. I've got to end this before it kills us.

SG: What things? What words? How was are you whoa what will've... happen me?

FSG: Find the pumpkin papers, Grissom! The pumpkin papers!

[[SFX: CAGE effect ends; Future Sally runs out]]

SG: Wait, pumpkin pay-...

[[SFX: Sally passes out; radio tuning]]

AP: I'm not a bad person. I'm not a bad person. I'm not a bad person.

CW: Anthony, do you remember why you called Bill Donovan all those years ago?

AP: I had solid math predicting Pearl Harbor.

CW: Now, why'd you call that in? Wouldn't you be better off extorting Uncle Sam for a payday? Holding that information for ransom? But you didn't do that, did you? You walked right into Bill's office and handed it to him. Why?

AP: Well, it was the right thing to do. People's lives were at stake.

CW: You're right. If only we knew, we could save people's lives. And now we can know about everything. Perfect situational awareness. Updates fast as the teletype can print them. We can save everybody.

AP: Okay?

CW: So could you maybe explain to me why on God's green earth you decided to murder the one person who could have made it happen!?

AP: I don't know...

CW: You don't know?! Why you strangled an old man in a hospital bed?

AP: You people took everything from me! My home, my career... you took Helen! All for his twisted ideology. He just... I just... I didn't know what came over me. Bill has this way of getting under your skin. Sinks his hooks into you.

CW: And that's why he deserved to be killed?

AP: He needed to be stopped.

CW: And you were the one who could stop him?

AP: I didn't know what I was going to do. After I heard what he did, I had to do something! It's not fair! It's not fair what he did!

CW: You know what I think is "not fair?" You killing a man with your bear hands because you don't like how the sausage gets made!

AP: Listen, I was... it was like he was goading me! Like he wanted it to happen!

CW: It doesn't what he was thinking! You're not in those cuffs because Bill wasn't as gracious as you wanted.

AP: I keep reliving it over and over again in my head. His face... I can't forget his face. This rictus smile as his face went purple. I see that face every time I close my eyes. I trace the veins in his face and the curl of his lips to depersonalize it. To focus so minutely as to rob his face of its humanity. But I can't. Every time it's just the same smile, looking right at me. Through me. I thought he would be afraid. I was afraid. Afraid and angry. But he was just... excited? Aroused? Even in death, Bill Donovan stays with me. I don't care any more, I just want this to be over. My life is over, Helen is gone, there's nothing left for me. Can't you just shoot me, or something?

CW: It's funny you should ask that.

[[SFX: intercom]]

CW: Hank, we're ready for you now.

[[SFX: door opens, Hank enters]]

CW: Hank, our mutual friend here was just talking about how he wants to be killed, too. What can you do about that?

HANK CORNISH (HC): Well, Dr. Partridge, it seems that you'll get your wish, as far as the rest of the world is concerned.

AP: What are you talking about?

CW: We're scrubbing you. You're being... let's call it "formally retired" from all work and family obligations.

AP: So... you're giving me a new name or something? Like June Barlowe?

HC: When you asked about being killed, I'm sure you meant us halting your biological processes through any number of methods: electric chair, firing squad, poison. No, we're killing you in a more figurative sense. Your address is being changed to a dummy location. Your services and subscriptions cancelled, and your accounts closed. We're refusing requests and letters on your behalf. Within a few days you won't have a life on any business or government records. A few months after that, you'll stop receiving communication entirely from people who don't personally know you. And then, slowly, your presence will fade from even the memories of those you knew and loved.

AP: Well that was heavy.

CW: But, you've got a choice about what happens next.

AP: Apart from my death?

HC: Well it's all about how you pass on, isn't it? Your first choice is simple. "Live" in a room like this until you die. Actually, smaller than this. Too narrow to lie down, too low to stand up. Eat once a day, shit in a bucket.

CW: Perk is you get to keep the bucket.

AP: I suppose you want me to take the second choice.

CW: Remember when I said that you murdered the only person who had a shot at saving everybody?

AP: Yes. I was there. It was three minutes ago.

CW: You can do something about that.

AP: ...Oh sure! use the Timepiece to stop myself. What a brilliant idea{!} That's not gonna happen, chief.

CW: No, you made your choice. And with choice comes consequence.

HC: You're going to become the bedrock for everything you've worked for at ODAR.You can be the genius that saves the world.

AP: ...I'm listening.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

ER: I will. I love you, Jack.

[[SFX: Hank and Chet emerge]]

ER: Did he go for it?

CW: It's the only shot Dr. Partridge has at redemption. His one chance to forgive himself. I think he'll go for it.

HC: It worked out better than I could've hoped. We had just planned on leveraging him with the abandonment angle. But then he gorged himself on guilt. Souers will be pleased.

CW: Hank, a man is dead. A great man.

HC: And the world turns on. All you see before you is now yours to do with as you see fit. Once Partridge is in the Blackroom, there's no stopping this.

CW: I can't believe we're actually doing this.

HC: Remember, we're changing the world. Nothing worthwhile has ever been easy.

CW: This is the right thing to do... Esther? Tell me this is the right thing to do.

ER: He brought it on himself. You know, I could deal with Jack giving up. I could deal with Sally saying no. But Anthony? I thought he knew better than to put his own vendettas before this. ODAR is bigger than all of us. It's bigger than Bill Donovan ever was. It was reckless and disappointing. I feel for him, I do, but we're not children anymore.

HC: Stop wondering about right and wrong, Whickman. Focus on the result. You want to keep this country safe? Do that, and don't distract yourself with the merits of petty morality.

CW: Right, yeah… Yeah. What's the timeline for Anthony's departure?

ER: It's on schedule. We should have the deployment package ready soon.

CW: Everything is in order, then. Once the Blackroom is operational, everything changes. We are the vanguard of the new order of things. Inform the rest of Central Intelligence Group that we're ready to go.

HC: Yes, sir.

[[SFX: tape recorder stop]]

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ars PARADOXICA is created by Daniel Manning & Mischa Stanton.
Episode 10: Consequence, Act II features -

Kristen DiMercurio (Sally Grissom)
Reyn Beeler (Chet Whickman)
Rob Slotnick (Bill Donovan)
Robin Gabrielli (Anthony Partridge)
Katie Speed (Esther Roberts)
Zach Ehrlich (Jack Wyatt)
Charlotte Mary Wen (Penny Wise)
Dan Anderson (Hank Cornish)
with special thanks to Isabel Atkinson

Original music by Mischa Stanton.
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WEATHER: clear

Ars Paradoxica

Season Two

11: Blackroom

WRITTEN BY DANIEL MANNING
DIRECTED & SOUND DESIGN BY MISCHA STANTON

[[SFX: tape recorder starts]]

ANTHONY PARTRIDGE (AP): Hello? Test, test... levels look good. I guess this thing can hear me. Ah, hi, I'm Anthony Partridge... I can't imagine that if you're listening to this you wouldn't already know that. The date today is... hell, does it even matter? It's October 28th, 1943, which for me, is every day. So, whatever that means to you.

As for where I am, it's a mite difficult to describe. Where do I start? There's a floor. A platform of cold, dark metal, the kind they use to make battleships. But beyond that, there's nothing. An inky black curtain cutting me off from the rest of the world and time itself. No real walls, no real ceiling, and a repulsive force when I put my hand near the edge.

This is where I live now. Where I will live, breathe, eat, and die. This room is my prison. My cage. I'm not being dramatic, either: it's really called a CAGE. Controlled Atemporal something or other. A little bubble in time isolated to a single moment, tethered to the deck of the USS Eldridge in the Philadelphia Naval Shipyard on the afternoon of October 28, 1943. This place, right here, right now is the nexus that makes time travel possible, and I'm here to make sure that the United States government takes full advantage of this in the service of ODAR, the Office of Developed Anomalous Resources.

The booklet I found when I got here calls this place "the Blackroom." I assume it's named after the place where Napoleon's people opened and read everyone's letters, but it might be that this is literally a big black room! My mission is to facilitate the communications for various iterations of ODAR across space and time. Messages, plans, intelligence, the results of next year's World Series... Yes, I'm a time travel mailman. How glamorous.

I came here to the Blackroom with the aid of a version of ODAR's time machine, which we not- so-cleverly call the Timepiece. I was sent with all the tools and equipment I'd ever need, enough C-rations to feed me for just short of forever, and a specialized computer that I invented that leverages the properties of the Timepiece to sort of "cheat" my way to solving arbitrarily complex problems instantly--which is necessary to coordinate all of the alternate futures and parallel timelines, and so on.

But that's not all I found when I got here. There were vastly more boxes and equipment than I was sent with. And it's from the future. There's so much in here that it's a little hard to get around.

The APU had all these modifications bolted to it, all kinds of tubes and cables and devices. There's a big wire coming out of it connected to some kind of

television set and a typewriter keyboard, probably a terminal of some sort for what comes out of the computer. There's big bookshelf with novels and periodicals and technical documentation. It looks like I have better rations as well. I'm glad I won't have to eat Beef Stew with Vegetables every day until I die.

I found this electronic dictaphone among the boxes. According to the information booklet it has the capacity to store over 1,000 hours of recordings, even though it's smaller than my palm. As long as I've got it, I figured I should record my thoughts. I'm not sure if anyone will ever hear them, but Sally swears by it. I think they help her to have something to talk at. To talk to. To help help sort her thoughts. Maybe they'll help me sort mine.

It's all got to be from future versions of ODAR that have been improving the system over the years. The planning that went into my job here continued for decades after I left. I can't believe Whickman really did it.

[[SFX: radio tuning; hospital room]]

CHET WHICKMAN (CW): It's hard to see her like this... I don't know if I can bear losing the two greatest minds I've ever known in the same week.

HANK CORNISH (HC): She'll make it through. Esther's got her on an incredibly rigorous schedule to make sure she doesn't end up a drooling idiot. It seems like whatever hit her was one hell of a shock to her system though.

CW: Did we ever get anywhere trying to track down the cause? She was fine a few days ago, and now... This?

HC: No, but the medic says it must've hit her all at once. Even considering where she comes from, her low-level background exposure to paradox wouldn't have caused symptoms this bad, this quickly. She's stable, but... There's a long road ahead of her.

CW: The preliminaries looked hopeful. And Sally's a fighter.

HC: I don't think I'd call her x-rays "hopeful." If they got to her any later I doubt they would have been able to help her at all.

CW: She goes down at 6:12, order comes in at 6:13, and they're carting her out at 6:14. These Timepiece guys are a damn miracle. Pardon the pun, but they really do run like clockwork.

HC: But we keep using them for all the wrong things! Come on Chet, that woman has no respect for this work. We've saved her how many times now?

CW: Can't put a price on a mind like Sally Grissom. She's one of a kind.

HC: I have never understood why you and Esther hold such fondness for her. What is it? Does she drown out your good sense by incessantly invoking movie scenes that don't even exist yet?

CW: You haven't known her like we have. There's more to Sally than just being from the future. Did I ever tell you how she invented the TAP?

HC: Enlighten me.

CW: She falsely assumed that I was accusing her of murder. She invented it to prove her innocence. She built the thing in three days flat, fueled by nothing but coffee and nerve. The thing worked perfectly! We've hardly changed the design at all since that first day.

HC: I'm not doubting what's in her head is valuable, but Grissom is a subversive. She's going to be a problem if she stumbles across something she shouldn't and goes the way of Anthony Partridge.

CW: What do you suggest, then? It's not like you can pull it out of her brain. We can't just cuff her to a radiator and politely ask her to run the research division, either. And we've already burned the "lock a genius in the Blackroom" card. We need her, Hank. Like it or not, she's the best candidate for the job. And if she's going to be useful to us at all, we've got to keep her on our side.

HC: How? I mean, the woman's practically a Communist, for God's sake!

CW: She'll come around. Once she gets a look at what we've been doing, she'll understand.

[[SFX: radio tuning; EKG]]

SALLY GRISSOM (SG): [incomprehensible]

DOCTOR (MD): Good morning, Miss Grissom.

SG: [Doctor.]

MD: Do you know where you are, Miss Grissom?

SG: [DOCTOR Grissom.]

MD: Hmm. I see. You're in the hospital, Miss Grissom. You've suffered a traumatic brain injury, and it may be affecting your ability to speak.

SG: Guhh–

MD: There's no cause for right now. There on the table next to you, there's a pen and paper. Can you pick it up?

[[SFX: Sally knocks the pen off the table]]

SG: [Goddammit!]

MD: There’s no need to strain yourself, Miss Grissom. You’re in a safe place. We’re going to help you get through this.

[[SFX: intercom buzzer]]

MD: Can I get someone down to one-sixteen? Sally Grissom is awake.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

MD: Alright, read the word you see on the card.

SG: Mahh.

MD: No, Sally. This is a train. (slowly) Train.

SG: Mow-mah.

MD: Train.

SG: Turmpeh.

MD: Good. That's progress.

[[SFX: Doctor flips to next card]]

MD: What's this one?

SG: [You're a dick.]

MD: Yarn ball.

SG: [Fuck you.]

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

MD: You're doing well, now read the sentence in front of you.

SG: *(stuttering)* The rains in Spain... fell... will fall plains?

MD: Try it again.

SG: Rains in Spain... falling... plain. Spain. Plain. Spain.

MD: You can do this.

SG: Spain rains were fall on plain. Mainly.

MD: [sigh] We're making progress.

[[SFX: radio tuning; crutches]]

SG: I hate this.

MD: We're re-training your body to accomplish many simple tasks that you used to take for granted.

SG: I feel like a child!

MD: You're doing fine. You just need to cross this corridor.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

MD: All right, I want to really dig into the source of these delusions.

SG: They're not… uh… crazy dreams, you quack! I'm not supposed to be here!

MD: Yes, you believe you're from the year 20[redacted]. What makes you think so?

SG: What makes you think I'm not?

MD: Well for one, the year is 1949. Here, have a look at my calendar. 20[redacted] simply doesn't follow, do you see?

SG: But I am! There was this thing, the time box and it... I was in Texas, and then Philadelphia, and New Mexico, and Colorado, and then... Then... I can't remember the words. I don't have the words.

MD: Miss Grissom, please—

SG: Doctor. It's Doctor. DOCTOR Grissom.

MD: When one suffers from a brain injury like yours, one may become confused. Irritable. They may remember experiences that never happened, times that don't exist. The future, this preposterous time machine... None of it is real, Miss Grissom. You must accept this if you're going to become healthy. It's perfectly natural to be frustrated when reality doesn't match up with your own fantasies—

SG: They're not! If that were true, how could I know every… America leader, for the next 80 years?

MD: Okay, go on.

SG: Truman, then... Um... The next one was... Okay fine! Bad…. picture! But it's all real! Ask Whickman. Whickman will tell you!

MD: Sally I'm sorry, but I can't continue to entertain your illusions. I mean, what kind of a name is Whickman? Come now, let's try some more exercises.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

AP: So now I've answered the what, the how, the where and when... I... I've been avoiding talking about the why. It's still hard for me to think about. My wife, Helen... She left me. She was... I thought she was my world, I could have sworn she was. But I got lost in the... The work, I guess. Lost in my own damn head. And she left me.

I never blamed her. Not once did I ever blame her for leaving. I blamed myself, for sure. And then I blamed Bill Donovan. I had proof on tape that he'd conspired to push Helen out of my life, and I thought... I thought if I could just... I don't know. I don't know what I thought. It's all sort of a rageful fog. And when I came out of it, my hands were on his throat and he...

It's all my fault, though. I mean sure, he may have given her the last push, but she wouldn't have been so close to the edge if I hadn't put her there. I didn't appreciate her enough. Her support, her loyalty. The sacrifices she made for us. For me. Honestly, how could I blame her? Helen was born to be on stage, and I locked her away. Robbed years from her. Dragged her on this quixotic chase to make a name for myself as the man who could predict the future. And look where it got me! (laughs)

Here. This was his plan all along, wasn't it? To get me to come here. He knew. He didn't know how I'd react, but... He sure got me here. Good damn job, you conniving piece of garbage!

I wonder what she's doing now. Will be doing. After she left. After I left. At least she can get a happy ending out of all this. I hope she's happy. I like to imagine she is, driving off into the sunset. She can finally do the things she always wanted. She deserves all the success in the world.

Helen, if you ever hear this: I am sorry. I am so, so sorry. None of this should have happened. What I wouldn't give to hear her voice one more time.

[[SFX: radio tuning; listening to a tape]]

SG: *(on tape)* But it's all real! Ask Whickman. Whickman will tell you!

MD: *(on tape)* Sally I'm sorry, but I can't continue to entertain your illusions. I mean, what kind of a name is Whickman? Come now, let's try some more exercises.

ESTHER ROBERTS (ER): What kind of name is Whickman, anyway?

[[SFX: tape stops]]

CW: It's English. People always spell it wrong though. Everyone always drops the "h."

ER: Don't even get me started. My father only changed it to Roberts because no one could spell "Rubashkin."

CW: This shrink isn't working. We can't keep hiding the past from her like this.

HC: I thought isolating her from the concept of time travel was the only way to bring her back to reality. How can we tell her where she's from without exposing her to that risk?

ER: How is she supposed to rebuild her psyche when we keep lying to her? We agreed that we would only isolate her from ODAR until such time as her fractured mind could handle the truth, and she's clearly more than ready!

HC: What about the lab techs? Aren't they still studying her? Save actual testimony, I thought that was the best way to determine what happened to her in there.

ER: We're not going to get there by burying the memory deeper inside her head.

HC: What about the TAP?

ER: The operators reported interference surrounding the event. There's too much tachyon activity in the area to get a clear picture.

HC: Tachyons?! I am so sick of hearing about tachyons. Make you an oracle, but only if they don't blind you first. Faster-than-light pains in my ass.

ER: They're tachyonic photons...

HC: Can't see anything if there aren't enough. Now we can't see because there are too many! I'm beginning to think you just blame tachyons for anything that goes wrong around here.

ER: Hank, it's needlessly cruel to keep Sally in a state like this, and you know it.

CW: Esther's right here. We don't need to toy with her head any further.

HC: My guys draw up a foolproof plan for reconciliation, and you don't even look at it. I assume you're moving forward with your plans to re-enlist her?

ER: Yes, unless you have another expert on four-dimensional particle physics in your address book! And it's more than a matter of finding someone else as gifted as she is, we also have to find someone that gifted, who specializes in the esoteric fields of study the Timepiece needs, who's strong enough to withstand this illness, and who doesn't mind giving up a shot a tenure. It's not like we publish, or put up a help wanted. On top of the fact that she knows more about the Timepiece than any other person alive today, myself included. Face it, she's the only one for the job.

HC: Okay fine, but you know there's another group of people that are just as able to withstand her "illness," as you say. We could always bring someone in from The 77s.

CW: Those agents are bloody murder to our bottom line. Have you read over the line item? It's like importing them from another country. Worse, since they also have to give up their families, acquaintances, their entire lives to come back to now. And you've heard Sally complain about missing her mail-order pizza and her hand telephones. God, the signing bonus alone...

HC: Grissom it is then.

CW: Agreed. Esther, you should pay her a visit. She's recuperated enough. Better get her out of that Potemkin hospital sooner rather than later.

ER: Of course, but before that there is one more item on the docket.

CW: Go ahead.

ER: The Blackroom support guarantee is turning out to be a more substantial task than we had anticipated. Even if we're only talking about one update every ten years, it's going to require an incredible amount of planning and research to get it to work.

HC: How difficult can it be to send back a pallet of food and supplies?

ER: You've gotta realize how finicky the Blackroom is. Remember, everything gets there at the same time as Anthony does. From his point of view, by the time he arrives, he'll have every package we send him, from ten, twenty, thirty, fifty, who knows how many years down the line. And once we send a package we can't un-send it later. It's all cumulative. Whatever we send in ten years time has to play nice with his original setup, as well as being compatible with future upgrades. And just finding the space for all that, given his fixed CAGE radius... You don't want to teleport a computer through his chest.

CW: No thanks.

HC: Oh, now if you'll excuse me, I've got a flight to catch.

CW: Recruitment?

HC: Flying out to the Seaboard. I've been eyeing a professor at the University of Delaware who might fit the bill. Wish me luck.

[[SFX: Hank exits]]

CW: Esther? When you see Sally, find out what happened. And tell her...

ER: Yes?

CW: Tell her I'm glad she's all right.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

AP: I have a confession to make. The whole reason I'm here is to use this terminal to send out messages, but... I haven't been doing that. At all. It's been about a week now... Or at least, I've slept seven times since I got here. The way the system works, new messages can't come in until I send the old one out, so all I have here is the first message ever sent over the network. So I figured hey, I've got all the time in the world, I can't start when I want!

I've spent my time pouring over the materials they sent back with me. They've got novels, magazines, scientific journals. I think I'm supposed to have music too, but I can't figure out how these glass records are supposed to work. I keep pushing through these dime-store novels by some fella named Stephen King. This guy has got it nailed down. He knows what it's like to be afraid of the dark.

It's weird to see how things will change in the next thirty years. Or really, how much they

won't. We're still drunk off the spoils of war,. We still get our rocks off on winning wars we probably shouldn't have meddled in. And the Red Scare that seems to creep into every aspect of life was already taking root when I left. I jumped into a new world head-first, and it turns out that it wasn't too different from the one I left behind.

Actually... I guess this place is my world now. A single room filled with technology and bookshelves. But all the distractions in the world doesn't compare to having a purpose, a reason to be. I guess I could call this my retirement, and give my bosses at ODAR the big up-yours, but that seems disingenuous to the deal I made. Will make. Will ha–... Hmm. This is hard.

And of course, if I never do the work, then Whickman's plan never works in 1947, it doesn't make sense that they'd continue to add onto the Blackroom well into the 80's. Does that mean I'm fated to do it anyway? Does it mean that I don't have a choice?

You know, Heidegger says that presence is a function of time, that we define our consciousness, ourselves, as the ceaseless march toward death, toward not being. We cannot be if we do not experience time. And in some sense, I still experience it. My brain will eventually cease functioning. But in another sense, time doesn't–I can't believe I'm about to say this–time doesn't experience me. In that sense, do I even exist? Does my present mind even matter if I can only experience the world through a non-place that itself has no concept of time?

Wait. What am I even talking about? I need to stop reading all this philosophy bull! It's depressing and doesn't make any sense. I'm sticking to pulp fiction from now on.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

ER: Sally?

SG: Esser?

ER: Oh, I didn't mean to wake you.

SG: Wait, Esther?

ER: I'm sorry, I can come back later if you like—

SG: Am I dreaming?

ER: Well... I mean, if you were, how would my answer help you?

SG: Oh thank goodness, it is you! You... You have to get me the hell out of this place. They won't believe me about the Timepiece—

ER: Shh shh shh I know. I'm going to do what I can to have you released. We heard about what's been going on.

SG: ...Who's we?

ER: Well, Whickman and me.

SG: And...

ER: And Hank Cornish.

SG: Cornish? The CIA snake in the grass? I'm out of commission for a few months and you bring in that prick?

ER: No... Sally, you woke up six months ago. And you were in a coma for a year before that.

SG: A year?!

ER: You don't have any clue what happened to you, do you?

SG: I couldn't remember, they told me I had a, a stress seizure...

ER: You suffered a... An attack. A violent illness. It's related to the Timepiece. Something about exposure to non-causal structures. It caused some sort of mental break. Worst case we've seen yet.

SG: Butterfly.

ER: What was that?

SG: I.... Um. I don't know. I just remember something about a butterfly. You said I was in a coma for a year?

ER: Well...

SG: What?

ER: Well, the only way we know of to treat your condition is...

SG: Being inside the CAGE.

ER: Yes, that's right.

SG: ...How did I know that?

ER: For your treatment, you spent two seconds inside the CAGE for every second you spent outside it. Until we knew it was safe to revive you.

SG: Uh–I lost three years?!?

ER: You should be so lucky. Last time this happened to someone they took three decades to the jaw.

SG: So... What did I miss?!

ER: Donovan's gambits paid off. We're a fully realized, if entirely underground, part of the CIA. Jack left. Helen went off to follow her dream, and...

SG: Anthony is gone. And we'll never see him again.

ER: Yes. He's gone.

SG: I knew you were going to say that.

ER: Sally, what do you remember?

SG: I don't know. Everything's just swimming in my head. Vague things. Butterflies. Clouds. The sound of thunder. I remember looking into my mother's eyes, and then... I'm eating pumpkin pie in her kitchen? Memories from my childhood, I guess. Maybe I heard about Anthony when I was asleep.

ER: There's a place for you, Sally. At ODAR.

SG: What do you mean?

ER: We are in desperate need of people who can understand the Timepiece. I'm trying to put together some senior scientists that can lead teams.

SG: So ODAR's like, a real thing again?!

ER: Even more so. It's a totally different animal. What we're doing would make your head spin. Uh... I mean, sorry.

SG: You're spies now.

ER: In so many words, yes.

SG: You said there's a place for me?

ER: There is, but you've got to get better first, Sally. You've got to clear your head... I think it'll be better if you see someone.

SG: Nuh-uh. No way. I am not going back to that man!

ER: No, of course not. That quack has done enough damage. We've got someone in mind. He's not going to try to convince you that Whickman wasn't real, I promise.

SG: Is he? Because I'm never sure. I'm not sure of anything anymore. You think I don't notice this isn't a real hospital?

ER: ...It's got real doctors that really treat you...

SG: There aren't any other patients. I've only ever gone down one hallway to go to every other part of this place, regardless of where it would be in the hospital. This is a cheap set.

ER: A staging area.

SG: So it's a set!

ER: If more people get sick like you, we want to have something prepared for them. And do you know what? Having a familiar-looking hometown hospital helped a lot to treat your time travel madness or whatever. It's not like there's a real Point-of-Exile General. And, this is a little inside baseball, but we actually do have a finite budget, especially when it comes to things that are not time machines, so building a full-scale hospital isn't really feasible.

SG: This is what I'm talking about! All the lying and the games and the... I know you guys are in the right place, but I'm not ready for this yet. The Timepiece took years from me. I need some time to recover. I'm taking a sabbatical. I'm not going to come back. This is too much. All of it, too much.

ER: I think you're making the wrong decision, but it's yours to make. I'm going to leave the expert's card anyway. Let me know if you change your mind.

SG: I'd say that you'd be the first to know besides me... But, be honest, you'll probably know before I do, right?

ER: Probably.

[[SFX: Esther exits; radio tuning]]

AP: I still haven't tried operating the computer, but I've been pouring over the documentation in this place and... The chance is slim, but I think I can contact the outside world. When data is transmitted out of the Blackroom, it mimics a high-frequency ship-to-shore signal that collects the messages and then holds them until they're ready to be broadcasted. But there's an information packet that gets beamed out with every message. It's small, but there is just enough room in it to sneak a few bits in there.

I've still got a few hurdles. Firstly, rigging the control packet to include the data I want, which shouldn't be too hard. Harder than that is figuring out how to program a system a paltry few instructions at a time. The biggest hurdle by far is that I can only send to a time that another Blackroom message is sent to. So, if I want to contact, say, 1952, and the only messages coming in are in every year but that one, I'm out of luck. It also means that I've got to start actually operating the Blackroom properly to have any contact with the outside world.

And so I return to the moral dilemma of being complicit in actions I felt so strongly betrayed my sense of humanity that I killed a man with my bare hands. If I help, then Donovan wins and they weaponize time travel. But if I don't, then I drive myself mad from the isolation. I wish I could just ask someone. Anyone who could just respond. What I would give.

Moment of truth, I guess. I've still got this first message. I should just read it, I guess. That'll help me decide.

[[SFX: Anthony opens an envelope]]

Oh. Yeah, that definitely clinches it. Sally's in trouble. My hands are tied. I have to send this message. Something happens to her. She must have some encounter with a time traveler or something to do with the Timepiece. Whatever it is, it's big.

[[SFX: typing]]

Existential whinging doesn't matter matter when the people you care about are in mortal danger. I'm going to start up the Blackroom, and Chet gets what he wants, and Sally doesn't have to die. Goddammit, Bill. You win again.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

SG: It's just... it's like they've moved on without me. Actually, it isn't like they've moved on without me. They have moved on without me. I mean, I don't know why I expected them to stay, but... I don't know. I didn't choose to be in a coma for a year, but who ever does?

I just wish I knew. I wish I knew what happened to me, how I ended up there. But I'm scared. What if I don't like what I find? What if it only makes my condition even worse?

I miss my friends. And I miss the work that I do. But this is the only route I have to them. I have to recover. It's all I have. I'm all alone out here, in the middle of exile, I don't have anyone, I don't have anything here! Without the work, I'm aimless. Not just for my career, like... for everything! It's not like I have a family I could go back to, or old college friends to pester. It's just me. I could try going out to the family farm, see if there's anything there I could latch onto. I still remember how to buck hay. I could clean barns. Live the pastoral dream. Forget about my old life. And my old old life. I see why it's so appealing.

Maybe this is just my stop. Maybe this is all I have. All I'll ever have. Just me, the girl with no name, wandering the empty earth. I could always disappear. Wyatt did it, somehow. Maybe I could go find him. What do you think?

[[SFX: sounds of a diner]]

WAITRESS (W): Uh, I'm sorry, but I have other tables...

SG: Oh, of course. Sorry. You're, uh, you're new, right?

W: I've worked here about a year and a half. Not too green.

SG: Lemme guess, last girl who worked here ran off with some boy.

W: You been here before, or something?

SG: Something.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

AP: I saw something the first time I turned off the lights to sleep. A light in the darkness. I tried to pretend it wasn't there, but it was. I finally realized what it is.

It's you, Sally. It's you, just nanoseconds before you get here. It was before I knew you. Before any of this happened. You were still a part of 20[redacted]. You had no idea what was happening. And now I'm in the same boat you are. Thrown out of time, isolated from everyone I've ever known. I'm sorry this happened to you, Sally. None of this would've happened if your machine and Lambert's Rainbow generator hadn't worked so perfectly together in the most unexpected fashion. I wouldn't be in here, Bill would be alive, you would still be happy in the future.

Were you happy there? I don't think I ever asked you. You don't like to talk about it much, I can say that. But you made the best of an awful situation in the 1940's. You don't get enough credit for your optimism. In hindsight I'm surprised that you'll survive your first few days here. But right now, you don't have to. Right now, in my forever, you're a bright star in an ocean of black.

[[SFX: radio tuning;Sally unlocks her door, enters; throws keys on table; presse play on her Answertron]]

SG: *(on machine)* Hi me, it's me! Unless it isn't me, in which case DON'T LISTEN TO THIS because these are my private Answertron messages. You have–SIX. EIGHT.–messages, and I'm going to play them for you now! Be you later, future me!

SG: Ugh. I am the worst.

[[SFX: beep]]

VOICEMAIL 1: I'm uh... I'm trying to speak to Sally Grissom about her subscription to Popular Mechanics. It seems that your bill is past due by six mo–

[[SFX: Sally deletes the message; beep]]

VOICEMAIL 2: Oh isn't this interesting! Hi, this is Carol Ludgate calling on behalf of the First Episcopal Church—

[[SFX: delete; beep]]

VOICEMAIL 3: Hi, this is John Beverly, calling from Speedy Message Service, Inc. I have a message for you from a... Anthony Partridge

SG: Huh?

VOICEMAIL 3: Message follows: disc jockey in Philly now STOP please come visit STOP bring your finest watches STOP would love to hear you again FULL STOP. Thank you very much, have a nice day.

SG: ...Wait, what??

[[SFX: tape recorder stops]]

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ars PARADOXICA is created by Daniel Manning and Mischa Stanton.
Episode 11: Blackroom features –

Kristen DiMercurio (Sally Grissom)
Reyn Beeler (Chet Whickman)
Katie Speed (Esther Roberts)
Robin Gabrielli (Anthony Partridge)
Brock Bivens, Lia Peros, Austin Beach (additional voices)
with special thanks to Isabel Atkinson

Original music by Mischa Stanton and Eno Freedman-Brodmann.
ars PARADOXICA is brought to you by The Internet: The real never-ending story.

20 08 24 20 11 17 | 08 02 18 02 10 12 01 12 14 08
WEATHER: foggy

12: Asset

WRITTEN BY JULIAN MUNDY
DIRECTED & SOUND DESIGN BY MISCHA STANTON

[[SFX: tape recorder starts; a park; Lou and David play chess]]

LOU GAINES (LG): And that's check! You know, strategy is supposed to be your own will projected into the real world, and from here I'm thinking your strategy is to let me win.

DAVID MARIAN (DM): Looks that way.

LG: What's eating you today? You show up looking like a bulldog chewing a wasp, say nothing about it, and all of a sudden your play goes to pieces.

DM: I'm just not in the mood for a game today, Lou, okay?

LG: Right mood or not, son, you need all the practice you can get if you don't want to embarrass yourself at the tournament. Not even a week left to go, and you've still got classes, the auto shop… If that mug of yours is because some little lady turned you down, I say "good." You don't need the extra distraction.

DM: It's not–I'm not going to be in the tournament.

LG: Excuse me? David, what the hell am I doing here if not to help get you match-worthy?

DM: I went over to the community center to sign up this morning, before class. I head in and go up to the table, no problem. This happy asshole with the clipboard takes one look at me, and I see his smile slide off his face like a piece of runny egg. I tell him I want to sign up, and he tells me there are no more open spots. People are already starting to line up behind me so I know exactly what he's doing, and I know I shouldn't bother, but no. No, I go right ahead, insist there must be a mistake, and anyway there wasn't any sign saying someone like me wasn't welcome. He insists back that no, there is no mistake, and that I should stop holding up the line. I can see in his little pig eyes what he wants to say, but won't lower himself enough to do it. And I get that weightless feeling, that I know means I should get out of there before I fold him over backwards and have to call you later on for bail money. So here I am.

LG: Well, I'm glad no blood was spilt, this time. Wouldn't want a repeat of that white boy at Monte Cassino.

DM: Yeah, I'm so damn proud of myself.

[[SFX: David tips his king]]

DM: So can we just postpone this for a minute? There isn't even a point now, anyway.

LG: The point is to take what I know you have, and polish it 'til you shine. You want to succeed, you better be consistent. Besides, I've got an entire sabbatical to spend staring at the wall, so I'd rather not start so soon.

DM: What are you– Wait, is that what happened at that meeting you were talking about?

LG: Well… well, Dean Meadows had to do something when parents start bombarding his office with calls about their "sons and daughters being subjected to Soviet influences."

DM: And that's academic for what?

LG: It seems some of my students took issue with the concept of investigating the differences between the Soviet press and ours. Some students turned in very well reasoned and researched papers, and the rest had an acute attack of "patriotism" and called home to crow to mom and dad. "Compulsory sabbatical," they're calling it, for now. As soon as they can cobble together enough to merit a real doubt about my politics, you bet they'll find a more permanent solution.

DM: But you're a damn hero! And I know for a fact you're no godforsaken pinko!

LG: David, let's just play again, I don't want to get into this.

DM: Did anybody even mention your honorable discharge? Do they know how this is gonna look to people?

LG: The point of a communism is that it spreads, right? It's like a stubborn germ. Who knows what we brought back with us from that war? And now everybody–including you, my friend–is losing their minds now that the Reds are testing their own nukes. We are the only country in history to use The Bomb as an offensive weapon, so maybe the Reds have the right to be a little afraid.

DM: Are you serious? Lou, you know what Joe Stalin does to his people! We both heard from troopers who were in the middle of that whole mess. And the poor dumb bastards still worship the prick as though nothing ever happened!

LG: You worry about what you can't control, son, and that's your problem. You concentrate on your best course of action, and you'll see how things fall into place. Now set this board back up, I want to see if you've been paying attention.

[[SFX: radio tuning; Lou lights a cigarette]]

LG: God have mercy, that boy...

HANK CORNISH (HC): They'll learn one day, isn't that right?

LG: [coughs, surprised] Uh, beg your pardon, sir?

HC: I assure you that's not necessary, sir. Just wanted a word with you, if you've a moment to spare. I hope I have it right that you are, in fact, Captain Louis Abbot Gaines?

LG: You've got it right, Mister...?

HC: Beck, sir, Francis Beck. I'm here in Dover on assignment from my bosses in the State Department, as it happens, and I wanted to make sure I paid you a visit.

LG: In what capacity?

HC: May I get in the passenger's side? I'd prefer it if we kept this quiet.

[[SFX: Hank walks around the car; enters]]

HC: I know you must be aware of at least a part of the threat our country faces these days, Captain.

LG: Now, I was discharged, Mister Beck. "Professor Gaines" will do for the moment.

HC: Professor, we in the intelligence community have reason to believe that–and I hope you'll keep this under your hat–there have been Soviet spies stationed in this country for some years now. We have every reason the Reds will attempt to send more, which is why one of our newest programs concerns grassroots defense initiatives: homegrown counter-espionage in order to preserve the peace, if you like. We believe men like yourself–veteran servicemen, men of diverse skills–are ideal candidates for our program, and as I understand it, you might be in the market for a new job sometime soon.

LG: You don't make it easy to start trusting you, Mister Beck. Were I some other man, I might consider rooting through my business to prepare for this meeting somewhat rude.

HC: We have our vetting process, same as anyone. We're just more thorough.

LG: All right, I'll hear you out. But I have one condition. I have a friend who might deserve this more than I do.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

ANTHONY PARTRIDGE (AP): Blackroom report twenty-two: routine checks on all systems have turned up no mechanical issues or malfunctions anywhere down the line. Honestly, given the questionable nature of all this, I stand a decent chance of never running into a single hiccup in the system. Maybe the moving parts aren't even moving and the whole thing has fused into a huge

tuning fork for tachyonic radiation. What if it's a perpetual motion machine? Unless someone ever lets me the hell out of here, I may never know for sure, and that's almost the worst part. Almost. The worst part is still definitely being stuck in a pitch black room for an interminable, confusing-to-define period. It is kind of a freeing feeling, though, not having to worry about shopping, bills, having to look presentable for work, any of it. Whickman could probably use a place like this, all the plates he has to spin. One Soviet nuclear test in 1949 and he starts hiring willy-nilly. Pell-mell, even. I've never seen Whickman panic, but this looks like his version of not taking the news well. In the end, ODAR has a reason to operate how it's always wanted to, spreading in the dark like mushrooms. God, look at all of them. BT50, HM48, LG49, DM50, KS49, I'm starting to sound like a bingo announcer.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

HC: Your full name for the record, please?

LG: Louis Abbot Gaines.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

DM: David Marian.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

HC: Mister Gaines, I understand you and Mister Marian served in the same unit.

LG: That's right. Three-Eighty-Eighth Mobile Infantry.

HC: Deployed in Germany?

LG: Italy. One hundred-thirty klicks southeast of Rome at Monte Cassino.

HC: Heard ground troops went through hell out there.

LG: Never saw anything like it, before or since.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

DM: I was the engineer in the unit, so I wasn't exactly recruited for my steady aim. But I helped make sure every jeep and tank we came across got to the garrison outside Cassino.

HC: You could shoot, though. Fight, too. Did your share of both, as I understand.

DM: I'd rather not get into that, if it's all the same to you, sir.

HC: I've got to hear it, if you're going to work for me. It's behind you, I just need to hear the details.

DM: Fine. So we've been at Monte Cassino for a good month, listening to shells tear up that gorgeous Italian countryside, and Lou gets a message saying we have to get into the city to help pull some poor, witless unit out after they get cut off. So we fight hell-for-leather through those Kraut sons-of-bitches, and when we get where we need to be, that division is down below combat-effective numbers. I'm so hot from tearing through to these boys that I barely remember jumping over the rubble or dropping any more of Gerry's boys. You can check the after-action reports for the facts. All I remember is a blur of noise and motion and recoil until we get back up on the hill overlooking the town. All of a sudden I'm hearing some Okie kid bawling about how Jimmy would still be alive if those porch-monkeys hadn't taken so long. I must've still been half-crazy with adrenaline... I don't really remember hitting him until someone pulled me back up to my feet in a full-nelson. That was Captain Gaines.

HC: And he took the heat for that, they tell me. Stood up for you when everybody else would've let them court-martial you.

DM: Yeah. He kind of took me under his wing, you might say. At least, he watched me close enough to stop me from knocking out any more of our boys. He was the one who suggested I enroll at Delaware State.

HC: Where Mister Gaines was a professor until recently, I understand.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

LG: That's correct.

HC: So your sabbatical was not, in fact, voluntary? The dean over at the college mentioned something about having students research good old Uncle Joe's propaganda industry or some such.

LG: The assignment was to analyze the effects of such strict control of the press as Stalin has imposed, and support a critical opinion on what the effects of the same might be over here. Too daunting a request for some, I can see now.

HC: So they ran you out for, what, proselytizing for the Russians? We take accusations like that very seriously, Mister Gaines. Times demand that we do so, so let's have it. You subscribe to a Communistic view of things, all men equal in the eyes of the state, that sort of thing?

LG: No, sir, I subscribe to the view "know thine enemy."

HC: Ah, you sound like a man who's read his "Art of War."

LG: At risk of sounding melodramatic, Mr. Beck, life itself is a battle for men like me. I've killed men. Not very nice men, certainly, but men. They had different skin color, different language, different, even repulsive, motivations, but they were still men. Sometimes you hear people ask each

other what they'd give to keep their country safe. They never think about what we sometimes have to take for it.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

HC: Would you do anything for your country, David?

DM: Yes sir, I would. Lou set the bar pretty high in that way, when we were in Italy. I'd give my all. Mr. Beck, I love my country.

HC: Thank you David. We–

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

HC: Thank you, Mister Gaines. We'll be in touch.

[[SFX: radio tuning; chess in the park]]

DM: I got a letter from Beck today, just like he said. I'm in. They want to ship me over to some place in Colorado for training.

LG: You're going to do it, then? Fight the good fight, like he was saying?

DM: Well, it makes sense, right? I make enough to get by at Calvin's, but you talk about getting my legs under me on that salary, and then there's tuition... Besides, it would look good to have some government work under my belt, right?

LG: Depends on whom you're asking, I'd imagine.

DM: You think it's the wrong move?

LG: Well, they never tell you more than they think you need to know, do they? Otherwise they wouldn't get so many volunteers. It's about the right thing, not the wrong move. Check.

DM: Lou... I know they treated us like dogs over there, no matter what we did. But I got to see the world, and had to face what a man can really do to another man. We did the right thing over there whether they thanked us for it or not. If I have to put my own life on hold for a while to save a few, I think I could sleep okay at night, you know?

LG: Heh. You know, you're starting to make sense.

DM: No...

LG: Yeah, sure does look like checkmate, doesn't it? Come on, I think I just saw Pete drop off the mail.

[[SFX: radio tuning; Lou opens his mailbox]]

DM: Is it in there? Wait, I think that's it!

LG: Sure enough.

DM: Well, go on!

LG: You want to open it? And stop hovering, I need to find my key.

DM: Ha-ha! For he's a jolly good fellow...

[[SFX: radio tuning; on a bus]]

LG: David. David, wake up, we're here.

DM: *(waking up)* Hmm? Oh, okay, good, that's good, I... Oh God, it's even worse than the brochure made it sound.

LG: I was right about the mountains, though.

DM: Stop, please?

LG: That diner looks pretty good.

DM: I think I changed my mind about all this, Captain.

LG: Didn't work before, son, won't work now. No Krauts trying to blow your ass to Kingdom Come this time, and you've got a nicer view.

DM: I'll tell you this for free: your pep talks haven't been getting any better since then.

[[SFX: radio tuning; murmur of recruits]]

RAY VICO (RV): Gentlemen, good day to you. My name is Raymond Vico. I will be in charge of shaping you into worthwhile ODAR agents, of trimming the fat from you, body and soul. Take this not for God-bothering. What we do, we do out of sight of our fellow man, so that he may go about his day without fear. If you do your duty the right way, the best hope is that no one ever hears about it, not even your fellow agents. If you find a life in the spotlight is more to your taste, you are free to go at any time and pursue the life of a showgirl, it makes no difference to me. Gab to anyone in your dressing room about this place, about us, and see if they believe a word of it. That is because we do things the way we do them, and this country is the stronger for it. The nature of our existence is the proof of our power, and if any speak of us, they speak of shadows they cannot touch. Say goodbye to your old lives, gentlemen, and welcome to perhaps the greatest task ever faced by free men. Let's begin.

[[SFX: radio tuning; recruits grapple]]

RV: Get your heel planted, Hollis. That's it! Come on, Sugimura, Gaines gets better leg extension with his damn limp! Swift, get under his shoulder or he'll make you pay for it, you bet your ass. Marian, get up here. Everyone observe, this hold depends on leg strength. You get behind him, you have the easy means for a quick incapacitation, even if he's got your height. Ready? Go.

[[SFX: Ray drops David]]

RV: Good! Next time shift to your right foot.

DM: Never seen anyone move like that, sir.

RV: Learned this one from my CO in Laos, only he put my lights out for real.

DM: We had troops deployed in Laos?

RV: Shut up and hit the mat.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

RV: This device is known as the Timepiece Field Kit. You have been briefed on the theory behind its operation, as it is what allows us to operate as we do. It is our most potent tool, and its use is a matter of the most severe need. By setting this to the desired date–see here–and activating it like so, you will arrive in the same geographical position, on the date entered. As you should have drummed into your heads like a bedtime prayer, you may travel no further than? Sugimura?

KENZO SUGIMURA (KS): October 28th, 1943.

RV: Good man. Reason being, Gaines?

LG: An anomaly in time and space brought about by a US military experiment. The Timepiece uses the energies focused in that location as an anchor point.

RV: Correct, and that is precisely all you are authorized to know on the subject.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

DM: –couldn't hit the broad side of a barn! He swings away at every pitch that comes his way, like he's batting by the law of averages.

KS: I think he's still–Um, good morning, Agent Vico!

RV: Beg pardon?

KS: I was just, uh, just wishing you a good morning, sir.

RV: And to you, Sugimura. Hope you rested well, you happy assholes start sleep deprivation training today. And who knows? Maybe we'll find a way to make it a little more exciting.

KS: Ah. Can hardly wait, sir.

RV: Enjoy your oatmeal, gentlemen.

DM: Good try. And for the record, the Cubs still have no shot without Cavaretta.

KS: Go to hell.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

RV: Well, Mister Sugimura, how are you feeling? It's been three days since you slept, give me a rundown of your physical symptoms.

KS: *(sleep-deprived, slurring)* I feel like... My head is all cotton-y. Some stuff blurred 'round the edges. Kinda... Kinda queasy.

RV: Now I want to test your memory. Three days ago, you wished me a good morning, and before I left, I said four words. Can you tell me what those were?

KS: Oh god... "Have a..." No. "Can hardly wait, sir?"

RV: No, that was you that said that. What were the four words I–

KS: I don't know, goddammit, I don't know! I can't remember, I can't think...

[[SFX: Ken falls; the recruits laugh]]

RV: You may have to stay active for long periods, gentlemen. Fulfill an objective within a tight window that won't allow for sleep. Remember our friend Sugimura when you hit day three, and slow the hell down. Take care in your movements. Control your emotions. Now would someone get him in a chair so I can continue?

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

RV: Gentlemen, today is the day. As of this moment, the six of you are members of our little circle. Your bravery and service to this country may never be known to the wider world, but we few will. We, who understand the significance of our task will know, and hold you dear above all others. As it should be. When I read your name, please step forward to receive the last real piece of identification you will ever own. You will notice it is imprinted with today's date, October 30th, 1949, and by these signs, the ODAR of any era will know you. When you travel backward to perform your task, I know the world you return to will be better for it. God bless America, and god bless all of you. Agent Ethan Avery.

[[SFX: applause]]

RV: Agent Brian Edmonds. Agent Louis Gaines. Agent Frank Hollis. Agent David Marian. Agent Kenzo Sugimura. Welcome, all of you. If you'll follow me, we'll be joining your fellow agents of the fairer sex for a little reception. I'd say you all earned a drink after six weeks of monkhood.

[[SFX: cheer; radio tuning]]

AP: –sound like a bingo announcer.

[[SFX: alert beep; typing]]

AP: Okeydoke, here we go. Oh. Oh. Oh no. Oh sweet Jesus on a pogo stick. This can't be right. There's no way Cornish could have screwed up so completely. And yet... This is the point, right? Straight from the horse's, stripped of all [OBJ]doubt or question of validity. Sit in silence, in the dark, to receive and transmit revelations, like an anchorite with a ham radio. Oh, and in case you're wondering, one of our agents, one Louis Abbot Gaines, had gone rogue, and obtained and provided the Soviets with photographs of the Timepiece Field Kit, because apparently our vetting process is handled by the interns. Now I have to save the G-man-shaped suit that contains Cornish's inept ass. We need a rival agency like I need a kick to the family jewels.

[[SFX: radio tuning; a party]]

DM: You know, I'm actually kind of surprised that you stuck it out all this time.

LG: Meaning what, exactly?

DM: Just thought you'd miss, I don't know, the academic thing.

KS: You were a teacher?

LG: Professor of journalism, for all the good it did me. The school didn't have the constitution for the more… challenging sort of curriculum.

KS: Yeah, well, the truth can be a scary thing.

HC: You work in intelligence now, son, best dispense with all that "truth" talk. It's unseemly and I won't have it in my house.

LG: Evening, Mister Beck. I didn't expect you to make it down here.

KS: Pour you one, sir?

DM: You should, Mister Beck, although I'm still not sure what "shochu" actually is.

HC: I'm not so busy I can't spare a moment to congratulate our freshly minted agents, but I have to decline the drink. I actually hoped I could have a word with Agent Marian for a moment.

DM: UH–of course, sir. Lead the way.

HC: Won't keep him long, fellas, I promise.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

HC: I'm sorry to pull you away like this, David, but this can't wait. Time is, shall we say, a definite factor.

DM: What's going on, Mister Beck?

HC: David, I'm afraid I received intelligence from one of our agents that Louis Gaines will pass on highly sensitive and classified documents to our "esteemed colleagues" in Moscow. David, I–

DM: No, sir. I don't believe that could be capable of something like that. And what do you mean "will?" How could you be so sure he's even thinking of–

HC: Because I know, David. We. Know. Ours is not to question "why" a man does a thing, David, only "how."

DM: Mister Beck, what am I here for? Why are you telling me this?

HC: Because you're going to stop him, son. This is going to be your first mission.

DM: I graduated an hour ago, sir! Why would you choose me for this?

HC: You're the only one who knows the movements and whereabouts of both yourself and Louis Gaines on the day in question.

DM: What day?

HC: The day you both got your acceptance to ODAR.

[[SFX: radio tuning; Lou and David play chess]]

LG: You're being awfully quiet.

DM: Well, I like to think I'm learning. Listening when others speak is a sign of intelligence, right?

LG: Are those chessmen talking to you? Check.

DM: More than they used to, anyway.

LG: You've gotten better.

DM: That, or you're getting worse.

LG: Well, I suppose we'll never know. You're the only one I ever play. That's checkmate. One more?

DM: Can't. It's about that time.

LG: You be sure to let me know when you get tired of cracking those jokes.

DM: Yeah. Goodbye, Lou.

LG: Best of luck, David. You know, you make me very proud.

[[SFX: radio tuning; bus terminal]]

HC: See you in the funny papers, Mister Marian. Use kid gloves and things will be just fine, you'll see.

DM: I couldn't ask for a simpler mission brief, sir.

HC: There never was anything simple about this life, son. You'll do just fine.

DM: Just one thing before I go, Mister Beck.

HC: Go ahead.

DM: You damn well better be right about this.

[[SFX: radio tuning; Timepiece activates; static distortion]]

DM: Oh... Oh god–

[[SFX: David vomits; radio tuning; David watches as the mailman leaves;approaches the mailbox; removes a letter; radio tuning; a fire; David crumples the letter and tosses it in]]

DM: Goodbye, Lou.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

AP: We need a rival agency like I need a kick to the family jewels.

[[SFX: alert]]

AP: Oh. "DM49 reports Gaines 'assignment complete,' no irregularities, no additional tangents designated for reconciliation. DM49 returned to flock for recycling. Gaines mission successful, repeat, no additional adjustment required." The system works. Mother of God, it works! It works.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

HC: Well, Mister Marian, what can I say? You've done very well, very clean work, I'm told. Agent Vico seemed very pleased… but I was never very good at reading him.

DM: I couldn't have asked for an easier mission brief, sir. Whatever burrower you got to put together that sequence of events, they sure know what they're doing.

HC: I'll be sure to pass your compliments on to the Blackroom. Now, if there's nothing else, I shouldn't keep Miss Roberts waiting–

DM: Mister Beck, I have something to add, if I may.

HC: By all means, son, you may.

DM: I would recommend a meeting with Mr. McCarthy's group in Un-American Activities, as soon as possible.

HC: Is that so? What for?

DM: ...To point them in the direction of Louis Abbot Gaines.

HC: I don't follow. The events triggering the Gaines assignment have been reconciled, and I can't help but be surprised that you'd throw your surrogate daddy to those wolves McCarthy has in his kennel.

DM: I don't know your Louis Gaines, sir. I never did. I reconciled one possible future for him, but you know as well as I do that this isn't the end of it. I would advise watching him for the time being, just in case.

HC: Very well, Agent Marian, very well. Welcome to your new life.

[[SFX: tape recorder stops]]

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ars PARADOXICA is created by Daniel Manning and Mischa Stanton.
Episode 12: Asset features –

L. Jeffrey Moore (Lou Gaines)
Alexander Cole (David Marian)
Dan Anderson (Hank Cornish)
Rabin Gabrielli (Anthony Partridge)
Richard Malmos (Ray Vico)
AC Slamet (Kenzo Sugimura)
with special thanks to Isabel Atkinson

Production help from Julian Mundy. This episode features the song "Man at the Clock" by Paolo Pavan Pasqualino Ubaldini via the Free Music

Archive, as well as original music by Mischa Stanton and Eno Freedman-Brodmann.
ars PARADOXICA is brought to you by The Internet: Any resemblance to persons living or dead is strictly coincidental.

17 22 16 04 | 19 16 11 18 16 23 | 19 09 22 | 23 05 | 13 23 17 13 19 25 24
WEATHER: cloudy

13: Signal

WRITTEN BY DANIEL MANNING
DIRECTED & SOUND DESIGN BY MISCHA STANTON

[[SFX: tape recorder starts]]

JOHN BEVERLY (JB): Hi, this is John Beverly, calling from Speedy Message Service, Inc. I have a message for you from a... Anthony Partridge–

[[SFX: voicemail rewinds]]

SALLY GRISSOM (SG): That can't be...

JB: Hi, this is John Beverly, calling from Speedy Message Service, Inc. I have a message for you from a... Anthony Partridge–

[[SFX: voicemail rewinds]]

SG: But they said...

JB: –Speedy Message Service, Inc. I have a message for you from a... Anthony Partridge–

[[SFX: voicemail rewinds; tape distorts]]

JB: –message for you from a... Anthony Partridge–

[[SFX: voicemail rewinds; tape distorts]]

JB: –message for you from a... Anthony Partridge–

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

SG: –I couldn't believe it!I thought I would never hear from Partridge again, but... here comes this message. Was this a trick? A goof? Am I going crazy? Probably that last one, but if I was going to hear from Partridge again, I needed to get to the bottom of this.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

SG: Hi, my name is Sally Grissom, and I think I got a message from you earlier? ...No, I don't think. I did get a message from you. Well, I need to know who sent it… It's the only message sent to this number. Well, If that wouldn't be too much trouble, I... hello? Did you hang up on me?

[[SFX: Sally slams the phone down]]

SG: Dammit!

[[SFX: phone rings; Sally picks up]]

SG: Hello? Hi, I... just called you–you do?

[[SFX: Sally grabs a pen and paper]]

SG: Can I send him something? Can you give me his... telegraph number? Telegraph address? Uh… Morse... code... thing? Let... me... write... that... down... OK, got it. Thank you!

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

ANTHONY PARTRIDGE (AP): Thank God she received it. It took her eighteen months to receive it. Of course, on my schedule I sent it about eleven minutes ago, but I was getting concerned. Half of me expected it would languish unheard on her Answertron forever. The other half of me knows that I'm a genius, and that she'd eventually figure it out. It's hard enough programming signal out of the Blackroom in Morse code as some kind of twisted cosmic joke and spoofing a signal to that service, but it got her where she needs to be. Let's see if we can't make something out of this.

SG: And so, for the first time in eighteen months, Partridge and I could exchange minor pleasantries. Over the telegram. I sent out "HELLO WORLD" and he–

AP: So she sends me "HELLO WORLD," and I've got no idea what that means, so I send back–

SG: –And he sends back "Hi world, it's Anthony."

AP: She says "I know, you dingus." That gave me a hope I haven't felt since I got here.

SG: –And we went back and forth like that. We got to work on this receiver, one that could let Partridge send more than dits and dahs out of the messed-up bubble that he's in... But it's hard to get substantial communication done talking like this.

AP: You ever worked with someone who's multiple time zones away? It's kind of like what Sally and I have to deal with, only with one person in Mountain Time and the other in a nonsensical timeless void, it's a little difficult to speak. Especially considering–

SG: Whenever I get something from him, I have no idea how long it's been. I got a response that said "SORRY FOR TWO WEEK DELAY" less than ten seconds after I sent the original message. It's all so finicky, since I'm in real time and he's in... whenever.

AP/SG: It's so nice to have something to do again...

SG: Since I stopped working for ODAR after my accident, I felt like I lost a part of myself.

AP: When you're in a place like this, you're like a corked bottle, waiting to explode.

SG: I was lost. Unable to do the work that has defined my life for almost a decade now.

AP: Speaking to Sally again, working together on this transceiver, even though I'm so thoroughly distant... it's reminding me why I agreed to do this in the first place.

SG: If not for the Timepiece, for these weird physics, I'm just trapped in a century with more reruns and less comfortable pants.

AP/SG: I mean, she's/he's the better off one...

AP: She gets to live! Like people do!

SG: He gets to watch over the rest of the 20th century all at once, and I have to wait while newspapers drip out of history's leaky faucet.

AP: I know this is the sentence for my crime. And bad mistakes, I've made a few, Lord knows, but...

SG: I don't have any family here!And my friends are all gone...

AP/SG: I'm just so lonely.

AP: Doing this gave me faith back. It gave me the willingness to do the mission.

SG: My head's been so cloudy since I woke up, but I feel like this little task helped my brain get back on its feet. Its li'l brain feet.

AP: We tinkered for weeks, which is a lot for me.

SG: It took us a month or so to build the thing, and I had to cannibalize my voicemail to do it. I'm sorry Answertron, I'll rebuild you soon!

AP: Sally had this idea about a wireless telephone, but I suspect it wasn't her idea.

SG: So basically I took a few bits from how I know cell phones work, spliced it with my voicemail and used the same kind of relay design they use in the Blackroom to relay messages. So now, Partridge has his very own time voicemail thingy!

AP: I'm not quite 100% on her explanation, but I think it'll allow me to record telephone messages that she can pick up. I trust that she's got her math right.

SG: I have no idea if my math is right, but it should work. I just need an antenna that exists now as well as in 1943. Which means I need an atlas, a phone book, and a trip to Philadelphia. All things that were obsolete in my day. Except Philly. I've got nothing against you.

[[SFX: radio tuning; sounds of an airplane in flight]]

SG: So as you can probably hear, I found my route to Philly. I was talking with Roberts, when she came to me with a problem…

[[SFX: radio tuning; diner]]

ER: –So I get a call from them, and it turns out the fault was actually an intentional part of their manufacturing process.!

SG: You've got to be kidding me.

ER: My team spent days error-proofing everything up and down–you should see the paper cuts all over Pitts's hands–and they're the ones to blame. Now because of their error, I have to go to New York to inspect the entire production line because I don't want to see another $100,000 computer go down the drain. And I certainly don't trust them to get it right on their own.

SG: Can I come?

ER: ...To inspect the production line?

SG: No, I don't care about that. I mean, like, come to New York. With you.

ER: With me?

SG: Oh my god I need to get out of this town it is so boring!

ER: ...Are you sure? I'm not taking a glitzy jaunt down Broadway. I'm there for 72 hours tops, and you'll be on your own. Sightseeing can take a lot out of you, are you sure you can handle it?

SG: Can I!

[[SFX: radio tuning; airplane]]

SG: –And that was how I badgered Roberts into letting me come with her on a work trip. Philadelphia is about two hours south of New York, by my count. I've just got to slip away from her (shouldn't be hard), rent a car, drive down there, sneak into a radio station, attach this transceiver on the top of the antenna... baby stuff, yeah? Anyway, so right now I'm in an airplane

bathroom while smoking a cigarette and holding a makeshift classified time travel cell phone radio. Suck it, TSA!

[[SFX: Sally takes a defiant drag]]

SG: I think this break'll be good for clearing my head. The last time when I was on vacation, there were five of us and I wasn't hiding my diary from the likely only person in a thousand miles whom I could conceivably call a friend. Well, there's Whickman, but... Things were so much easier back then, before I spent a year and a half in a coma and everybody I knew either left or died...

I'm scared, you know? I'm not sure if I know Roberts anymore. I'm not sure if I can trust her anymore. She's part of this enormous secret machine, and I can't tell where her loyalties lie. Was that always true? Am I missing something? I can't ever tell what's going on in her head. Like, I don't think she'd leave me to die in a ditch, but when it came down to the job versus losing her best friend, she went with the job. How did she feel about that? About not standing with Wyatt? I'm allowed to ask that, right? I can ask her how she felt? I don't like dealing with this whole Other People's Emotions thing...

Roberts is an enigma. I mean, she always has been. It's probably why she's perfect for this kind of job. But, you know, it makes it hard to be friends with her sometimes. You talk to her, and you'll experience a Generally-Pleasant Genuine Esther Roberts Interaction, but you're never sure if she's actually generally pleasant, or just good at looking that way.

Does it matter in the end? I don't know, but why am I hiding this receiver from her? Do you think she knows about my plan? I feel like I can't trust her the way I could two years ago–

[[SFX: door knock]]

PASSENGER: Excuse me, miss?

SG: Just a minute.

PASSENGER: You've been in there for–

SG: Just a minute! *(rushed)* Trust her the way I could two years ago, but I'm not sure whether that's true or I'm just projecting onto a person who has grown and changed without me okay bye.

[[SFX: radio tuning; Sally and Esther enter the hotel room]]

SG: Ugh, let me out of this... thing!

[[SFX: Sally undresses]]

ER: I like dressing up for air travel. I get to feel fancy.

SG: You say that now. Just wait a few decades, and you'll be begging to wear a sweater and jeans.

ER: Jeans?

SG: ...Waist overalls. Whatever.

[[SFX: Sally sits on the bed]]

SG: So when are you telling these people what for?

ER: I have a preliminary meeting with them in the next few hours. Are you sure you can take care of yourself while I'm gone?

SG: Really, Roberts? I'm an adult woman, not a puppy-dog.

ER: I worry about you, Sally. I'm still worried about losing you again.

SG: Because I might finally go off the deep end? Or because I'm not a valued asset anymore?

ER: You were in a bad way, Sally. Nobody was sure for the first month that you were even going to live! And then... and then we thought you might never wake up.

SG: I didn't–

ER: I know it wasn't your fault. I mean, it wasn't, right?

SG: [non-committal shrug]

ER: I don't want to go through that again. I don't want you to go through that again.

SG: Thank you.

ER: Now are you sure there isn't...

SG: No! Go I want to see Times Square before it gets covered in advertisements.

ER: Well, it kind of already is...

SG: I'll be fine! Go chew out an incompetent manager or five. You won't even notice I'm gone.

ER: Okay, if you're sure. Take care.

[[SFX: Esther exits; Sally picks up the phone and dials]]

SG: Hi, yes. I'd like to rent a car? ...Yes, if I could.

[[SFX: radio tuning; cars pass on the side of the road]]

SG: October 27 1949, part two. I'm about ten miles out of the city, and I'm getting everything ready for this... whatever I'm planning. The transceiver's in the back, and I'm taking it to a station I found in the yellow pages a couple miles away from the Naval Shipyard. It should work for my purposes. Also, the call sign is W.H.A.T. and that makes me so happy. Oh! Oh! And I got something else before I left New York. These! ...Right, you can't see. They're lockpicking tools. I got a set of lockpicking tools in the city. Now, I might be a little rusty, but I got pretty good at picking locks while I was an angsty teenager who thought it'd make her edgy and mysterious but really just reinforced that I was an enormous nerd. I had one of those practice locks encased in Plexiglas so you could see the interior and everything! Hooray for a little bit of breaking and entering! I mean, uh... I'm not going to commit a crime, that would be...

I should be a little bit more careful about what I say on these things.

But will I? Probably not.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

ER: As I said, the recording is a formality. I just want it for my notes.

PLANT MANAGER (PM): Of course, Miss Roberts.!

ER: Shall we get started?!

PM: Of course.!

[[SFX: tape fast-forward]

PM: The pipeline goes through here. And here is where the additional zinc content you spoke about was being introduced into the batch.

ER: And you do this intentionally?

PM: Well, yes! With it, we can replace a third of the aluminum with zinc and pass those savings onto you with only a six percent reduction in overall tolerance.

ER: I'm not paying you to deliver my specifications less six percent. You're replacing that part of the pipeline.

PM: Of course. We are committed to giving Mr. Whickman anything he wants. You can tell your boss that he can rest easy on future orders, Miss Roberts–

ER: –You are not working for Mr. Whickman, Mr. Maharis, you are working for me. Don't you forget it.

PM: Uh... of course, ma'am.

ER: I could have made my contracts elsewhere, and I chose you over your competitors. Don't make me regret it. I won't tolerate incompetence like this pipeline issue again—have I made myself clear?

PM: Yes ma'am! Uh, thank you, ma'am. I apologize for the inconvenience.

ER: Thank you. Now, could you tell me where a girl can get a strong cocktail around here?

[[SFX: radio tuning; on top of the radio tower]]

SG: So here we are. In the myriad of times I've been in danger during this whole thing, never have I been challenged by a for as mundane as falling. But because I am short on both safety equipment and patience, I am making due with what I've got.

This is... tall. Like, light skyscraper tall. I probably should reconsider, but when Sally Grissom makes a plan she better damn well go through with it. I'm going to climb this radio tower, start up the transceiver, and then... the all-important climb down. Assuming that I am not a broken puddle on the ground by that time, I will still be alive! And in the event of that miracle I should be able to just call 215-[redacted] and leave Partridge a voicemail, and hey, that's it. I've just brought a man back into contact with the real world. Take that, meaninglessness of the universe!

If not, and this serves as my last words or something... I'll miss you all. I mean, I won't. I'll be dead and won't have the capacity to miss things, but you know what I mean. Whickman, I'm sorry about the mess you'll have to clean up. Then again, you'll take all my tapes and notes and inventions so maybe not so bad in the end. And Esther, I leave you my... you know what? Since I'm probably not going to die here I'll skip this weird bequeathment and let you fight over my stuff, what little there is to have. Partridge, if I don't switch on the transceiver before I… [pop], I'm sorry you don't get to contact the outside. Then again, you probably won't hear this so this will is basically useless on all counts. Good to know that my wishes in death don't matter. Take that, meaninglessness of the universe...

I'm leaving this recorder on the ground. See you later.

[[SFX: Sally puts the recorder down]]

SG: Ohhkay. Okay okay okay. All right.

[[SFX: Sally climbs the antenna; she slips, almost falls, then resumes; attaches the device; climbs back down]]

SG: Hah! Piece of cake!

[[SFX: radio tuning; Esther makes a call in a phone booth]]

ER: Uh, hello, can I speak to Bridget Dreyfuss? ...Bridge? Hi, it's… it's Ettie Roberts. Yeah, it's me. I know, it's been forever. I was in town, and I heard you were working at the New York Public Library. Do you want to catch up? I owe you a drink. ER: Meet me at the [redacted] at 8. I'll see you there, Bridget.

[[SFX: Esther hangs up; radio tuning]]

ER: Gin and tonic, please.

BARTENDER: You got it.

ER: Bridget! You came!

BRIDGET CHAMBERS (BC): Oh god, it must have been...

ER: Don't do the math, it'll depress you.

BC: I don't, that's why I stayed in the liberal arts.

ER: I was headed back to New York and the alumna newsletter said you were still here! And I couldn't miss a chance to meet the incomparable Bridget Dreyfuss.

BC: Chambers, actually. I got hitched.

ER: I know, I heard, that's so... how is that supposed to function?

BC: Ted and I tackle the problems of life together–of which there are many–but we, you know… We have our own pursuits. It helps that we have a similar mindset.

ER: Was that a metaphor for...?

BC: Yes, it was a metaphor.

ER: Gosh, we both went so far, you got married, I finished grad school...

BC: Right, about that! What brings you out here?

ER: Work. I had to take a few meetings.

BC: What do you do anyway? I heard that after you left for grad school you ran out west.

ER: Oh, I suppose that's more or less the truth.

BC: So you're not going to say...

ER: The government. I work for the government.

BC: Doing science? Wait, were you one of those people who worked on the bomb?

ER: [laugh] No, I wasn't!

BC: Yes you are! You're working on the bomb!

ER: It's not that!

BC: Your secret's safe with me. I always knew your genius would catapult you to great heights.

ER: Alright, you got me. Don't tell anybody.

[[SFX: tape fast-forward]]

ER: [laugh] And Cynthia never knew!

BC: She never found out?

ER: Whenever she asked about me going out I'd just tell her I was off to the library.

BC: You were off to the library for days at a time!

ER: Do you remember the way I studied?

BC: I just can't believe you broke the bank being a bookmaker in Atlantic City and your own roommate never knew about it!

ER: It was easier than tending bar in a place like this.

BC: Okay, working at The Sidecar paid the bills. Besides, I wouldn't have met you.

ER: You could have met me in Professor Sampson's class.

BC: Bah, I was afraid. But when you walked into that bar you were on my turf.

ER: I'm glad I did. Everything was different back in college. It was Bridget and Ettie Vs. the World. It all felt... brighter, you know?

BC: ...That was the delirium from working 70-hour days.

ER: ...So you're working at the city library now? It said in the alumnae newsletter.

BC: I'm an archivist for them. The Lenox estate uncovered a large collection of rare books that supposed to go to us, but nobody knows what's a part of them–

ER: So they called the greatest American biblio-anthropologist this side of the Mississippi?

BC: Still a charmer, Ettie...

ER: Guilty as charged.

BC: So they open up this house in Queens, and it's filled with stacks upon stacks of unsorted texts. It's going to take ages to properly add them to the primary collection.

ER: You're pretty busy.

BC: It keeps me engaged.

ER: That used to be my job.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

BC: ...Wow, that was a lot. I need a...

[[SFX: Bridget grabs a cigarette and a lighter; lights up]]

BC: Cigarette?

ER: Yeah.

[[SFX: Bridget lights one for Esther]]

ER: Oh, thank you.

BC: So you wouldn't mind if I started calling you "the female HG Wells?"

ER: I would deeply mind if you started calling me "the female HG Wells."

BC: You know, I felt so vindicated when you told me I figured you out, Ettie.

ER: Yeah, and what do you think now?

BC: That the rabbit hole goes deeper than I ever imagined. I thought the bomb was crazy...

ER: Here's a fun fact, Bridget: I am one of the highest-ranking women in the United States government.

BC: No shit! I always knew you were destined for great things.

ER: What ever happened to us? I thought we had something special.

BC: Don't, Ettie. Can we not? This is nice, just let it be.

ER: I feel like after I went to graduate school you never called or wrote. We just sort of... fizzled out.

BC: That's how you remember it?

ER: I mean, I remember that it got a little ugly, but that was more than ten years ago.

BC: I was hurt, and you didn't care.

ER: I cared! What we had meant a lot to me!

BC: You're... You said I was a "burden" to you!

ER: Jesus, Bridget, I never thought of you like that. I... I said a lot of awful things back then.!

BC: It's okay, I've accepted it. I was relieved to hear it.

ER: What is that supposed to mean?

BC: You weren't going to give up your life just to live a schoolgirl fantasy. What were we going to do, get an apartment and tell everyone we were just "unlucky in love?" Esther, I was relieved because you were free to not care about me, and I was finally out under your thumb.

ER: This is the first I'm hearing of this.

BC: You were there! Ettie, you are a sweetheart but only because you feel like you have to.

ER: I don't know what kind of person you think I am, but–

BC: I know what I remember. You like to think you're always the good girl, but... I don't think you see how you hurt people.

ER: I've dedicated my life to helping people. My job–

BC: Your job is in service of the same warmongering tautology that's going to push us and the Soviets into nuclear annihilation.

ER: How progressive of you. Maybe you could convince the senator from Wisconsin to stand down.

BC: Ettie, it's not that you're a bad person. It's that your own ambition gets in the way of you being emotionally available.

ER: Bridget, I can't believe you think this poorly of me!

BC: I don't think poorly of you! I'm just a realist. I know who you are and you're not going to change and that's fine. But it means I'll never have you.

ER: You know, this wasn't just a social call. We need someone at my organization. Someone with your skills–

BC: Are you serious?

ER: Bridget, your grasp on the American collective unconscious is unparalleled. We need somebody like you who can track and plan for possible outcomes for when we change things.

BC: No.

ER: That's it, just no? The opportunity of a lifetime, and just no?

BC: Yes! No! I mean—Ettie, I'm not going to come work for you!

ER: But why?

BC: Because–I mean, what the hell was all this? You called me up, out of the blue, act like everything's fine, and then somehow we end up back in my bed? And then you say this was all for a job? Why do you keep doing this to me! I thought I was free of your damn games.

ER: Bridget, I...

BC: Get your clothes and leave, Ettie.

[[SFX: Esther gathers her clothes]]

ER: It was... It was really nice to see you, Bridget.

BC: Just get out.

[[SFX: Esther exits]]

BC: [sigh] Alright, she's gone. I'm going to edit that first part out of the record for decency's sake… but you were right. She wanted to recruit me. When you pick up the tapes tomorrow, leave a signal if you want me to follow her companion as well. I'm sorry I doubted you, [redacted]. We'll talk soon.

[[SFX: radio tuning; the shipyard; Sally dials a payphone; it rings]]

SG: Here goes nothing... Hi. It's me. This... this worked, I guess. Otherwise you won't hear this. Maybe the sound is messed up. I dunno. This pay phone's number is 215-[redacted]. Call me back.

[[SFX: Sally hangs up; the phone rings; static on the line]]

AP: It works, Sally. It's fine. [sniffle] I'm okay. Thank you. It's just... you're the first voice I've heard that isn't my own in so, so long. I just listened to your message three times in a row! Thank you.

[[SFX: recording ends; Sally hangs up]]

SG: I did it! I did it! It has been so long since something went right. So long since something I did didn't end in disaster!

I can see the dock where the Eldridge was from here. It's the same as it ever was. You wouldn't know that it's where I started my new life here. It's where all of this began. Well, it started in my lab, but whatever. Language wasn't built for this! The last time I was at dock 47, I was broken, delirious, and had 273 unread emails. Now I don't have any of those things.

Do you think anybody remembered? Do you think anybody realizes that today is the sixth anniversary of all this? It's been six years since I was reborn in Philadelphia, and nobody cares! Where's my cake? Where's my party?

[[SFX: splash]]

SG: What the... someone just fell in the water!

[[SFX: tape recorder stops]]

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ars PARADOXICA is created by Daniel Manning and Mischa Stanton.
Episode 13: Signal features –

Kristen DiMercurio (Sally Grissom)
Katie Speed (Esther Roberts)
Robin Gabrielli (Anthony Partridge)
Rebekah Allen (Bridget Chambers)
Zak Stevens, Amanda Bailey, Brock Bivens (additional voices)
with special thanks to Isabel Atkinson

Original music by Mischa Stanton and by Eno Freedman-Brodmann.
ars PARADOXICA is brought to you by The Internet: Sure, there are legal parts of it, why?

07 25 19 | 11 15 05 10 | 24 15 08 15 | 22 24 26 04 06 12 11 14 22 02 | 15 12 08 22 05 | 04 17 26 15 25 01 04
WEATHER: showers

The Recorder of Dr. Nikhil Sharma

WRITTEN BY TAU ZAMAN
DIRECTED & SOUND DESIGN BY MISCHA STANTON

[[SFX: tape recorder starts]]

NIKHIL SHARMA (NS): And so I recorded her voice pattern, called her husband, and told him: "Don't ever speak to me again!"

FUTURE ODAR OFFICER (OO): I don't seem to understand the problem here. It sounds like your mission was a success!

NS: If you can call it that.

OO: Be direct, Doctor Sharma.

NS: I just, I remember hearing her husband's voice crack. And then he started crying. I could just see him sinking to his knees on the other side of the phone. He made this horrible, sad sound. It was like... like killing an animal.

OO: And how did that situation make you feel?

NS: I just remember thinking, this is a kind of power no organization should have.

OO: Doctor, you seem to sound like you're unhappy here.

NS: No, it's not that I'm unhappy here, it's more that I have a hard time seeing how we're making anyone else happy. It seems like all we do is cause more people pain.

OO: It sounds like you don't appreciate our organization's values.

NS: I do! But virtue #2 is honesty. I'm trying to tell the truth here about what I feel.

OO: Thank you for your honesty. I'm being honest with you in saying perhaps you're just not the right... "values fit" here.

NS: Officer, with all due respect, "values fit" is just pretty HR lingo for "culture fit."

OO: We're going in circles here. Why don't we... take a couple of weeks, see how you're feeling, then re-evaluate.

NS: And what happens when we... re-evaluate?

OO: ...We'll see.

[[SFX: radio tuning; sounds of hand-to-hand combat; Mateo throws Nikhil]]

NS: I...demand...a rematch!

MATEO MORALES (MM): We said best two outta three.

NS: At least gimme a hand.

MM: No can do.

NS: C'mon, Morales!

MM: What's virtue #3 in the ODAR field manifesto?

NS: ...Self-reliance.

MM: That's more like it, soldier.

NS: "Soldier..." I'm pretty sure I've been in ODAR longer than you. No fair you get to be senior.

MM: And YET, Doctor Sharma, you're the one on the ground.

NS: If I get back up can we rematch?

MM: Sorry. Try again tomorrow, young grasshopper.

[[SFX: radio tuning; Nikhil runs in the rain]]

NS: *(out of breath)* Have I mentioned that running... really isn't my thing?

MM: *(out of breath)* Just remember, what's virtue #5 in the ODAR field manifesto?

NS: Perseverance!

MM: Yeah... we're gonna see this through! Or, y'know... we could just call it a day... no one has to know...

[[SFX: radio tuning; Nikhil and Mateo spar; crack of bone]]

MM: AUGH, my nose!

NS: Block your head, man!

MM: No I'm serious stop stop stop!

NS: Shit.

MM: You broke my nose dude!

NS: I'm sorry! I'm a doctor, I can fix this.

MM: I've got a mission tomorrow!

NS: Okay but I doubt you're going to need your sense of smell so it's ok

MM: ...Dick. This isn't funny.

NS: It's kind of funny.

MM: No it's... [laugh]

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

NS: See? Good as new.

MM: I dunno if this bloody mess on my face counts as "new."

NS: Well unless your mission tomorrow requires some good old-fashioned spy-like seduction, it'll have to do.

MM: And what if my mission does call for the ol' honeypot?

NS: Then goodness help you in finding some way to charm them.

MM: Damn. You're saying you wouldn't fall for this mug?

NS: I...didn't say anything of the sort!

MM: Ah, so you think I'm handsome.

NS: Listen, all I'm saying is it doesn't matter how handsome anyone is! I think anyone would have a hard time looking past a bloody nose.

MM: So can I ask you to look past it for a minute?

NS: Why...?

MM: I want to try something.

NS: Try–

MM: This.

[[SFX: Mateo kisses Nikhil]]

NS: I... I wasn't expecting that.

MM: Relax, just practice for the mission, that's all.

NS: How long will you be gone?

MM: I dunno. A while. Hell, I'll be gone as long as you need to stop blushing.

NS: Just...be careful.

MM: Aw, you caaaare!

NS: I most certainly do not care. Get lost, Morales!

MM: Call me Mateo.

NS: Mateo Morales Cervantes Moreno–get. Lost.

MM: That's more like it. G'night, Doctor Sharma.

[[SFX: Mateo leaves]]

NS: Call me Nikhil. Try not to die or anything. I'm a doctor but I can't fix the dead.

[[SFX: radio tuning; ODAR mess hall]]

NS: Diary of Doctor Nikhil Sharma, August 28th, 20[redacted]. I'm beginning to think I should use this recorder less, or at least take out the more embarrassing bits—

MM: *(distant)* Nikhil!

NS: Mateo?

MM: It's good to see you, man. I missed you!

[[SFX: Mateo hugs Nikhil, blocking the recorder]]

NS: I missed you too, but, I mean, I saw you just two days ago. And wow, your nose healed insanely fast!

MM: Uh...right. Yeah. Duh. Just feels like a while.

NS: It sure does. How'd you get that scar?

MM: This old thing? Oh, I've always had it.

NS: No you haven't. It wasn't there two days ago.

MM: So you've been checkin' me out, eh?

NS: Mateo... it hasn't just been two days, has it. You look...different.

MM: Nikhil, don't do this—

NS: Have you been... time traveling?

MM: What! No! ...Okay, just a little.

NS: I thought ODAR abandoned time travel in the 90s!

MM: I mean, that's what we said.

NS: Fucking ODAR. I knew it.

MM: It was more that we just... developed... better "anomalous resources." Why bother going back in time, when now we have technologies to manipulate the present so much more efficiently?

NS: Yes, but the Timepiece is clearly not a thing of the past. You still go back.

MM: Yeah, sometimes, when we really need to. But for the most part we've already changed history as much as we need. So very rarely do we ever need to go back more than a year at a time. Minor tune-ups.

NS: ...So you went back a year. Completed your mission. Then you waited to catchup to our time, in the present, before walking through that door?

MM: And I had to remember what day I left here. So I could come back to HQ exactly one day later than that and act like nothing ever happened.

NS: ...My head hurts.

MM: Oh yeah? Try reliving this past year.

NS: And the world still sucks. Guess you failed.

MM: Hey, I did my best. Turns out the honey pot didn't work.

NS: ...So this is why they still teach us to resist Butterfly Syndrome. In case they need to send us back.

MM: Well yeah. Can't use CAGEs anymore.

NS: I can't believe we're still doing it. Tinkering with the past? Really?

MM: ...They say it's safer these days.

NS: It's NOT safe.

MM: I know. Remember that study? With the kids? There's a reason nobody goes that far back anymore.

NS: Doesn't it bother you that we even let that happen?

MM: Sure, but–

NS: No 'but.' It's wrong.

MM: ...You're right. It's wrong. Actually, I was going back because... I wanted to see if I could put a stop to that too.

NS: So there was never a mission?

MM: No, there was, but it was a stupid mission. This other one I... gave myself.

NS: I don't like the sound of this, Mateo–

MM: Look, we can't talk here. But actually I could really use your help. How about my quarters, at 1900?

NS: Look if this is a continuation of what happened the other day—

MM: Relax, no funny business. I really just wanna talk to you.

NS: Right! I mean, I had no assumptions, I just... You know...

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

MM: Sally Grissom. The woman, the myth, the legend.

NS: She's beautiful.

MM: She's in danger. ODAR wants her gone.

NS: That's why they sent you back?

MM: No, she was already dead by last year. They want her dead... sooner.

NS: How come?

MM: Hard to say, something's got them spooked. But listen, you don't exactly love it here, right?

NS: I manage to separate my ethics from the work we do on a daily basis, yes.

MM: When I went back, I ran into someone who wanted a put a stop to this. I mean all of it. Wanted to shut ODAR down for good.

NS: That's impossible. They've already eliminated all historic threats to their existence.

MM: Except Sally.

NS: But she's already dead!

MM: Something she does in her lifetime still paves the way for whatever threat she poses to ODAR now. That's why she needs to die sooner. I'm going to recommend you for the mission.

NS: You want me to kill her?

MM: Think about it. ODAR thinks they're still in danger here, in the present. It must be because she left behind some kind of legacy they didn't know about. Something that could undo everything they've built.

NS: Why don't you just do it?

MM: I... can't. This was my last time travel mission.

NS: Oh, god. Mateo, no. They keep sending you back, we have no more CAGEs for recovery–

MM: I'm fine. I'm still me. For now. But Nikhil, you have to listen to me. This past year, this is what I was trying to track down.

[[SFX: Mateo unfolds a schematic]]

NS: Schematics?

MM: For an anchor point. A second one, separate from the Eldridge.

NS: Meaning what?

MM: Meaning you could choose which point you want to travel to. And if we made one here...

NS: People could travel forward. To the future.

MM: Correct. But the anchor first has to be made in the past, with the Project Rainbow generator in the original ODAR facility in Colorado. We can map this point in the present as coordinates, such that you retroactively forge a new anchor and can come back here with an old Timepiece. But the first anchor has to be on the other side. It can't be initiated from here. Our current technology was modernized to never emit the same level of radiation — a level we'll need to forge the anchor point itself.

NS: Who... who gave you this idea?

MM: A lot of people actually. Across time. They've collectively been trying to design something to take down ODAR. Across decades, without ever even meeting each other, sometimes.

NS: Can I really make a jump this far back? All the way to young Sally Grissom and the retro Timepiece?

MM: What if you did it in smaller jumps? Like those kids?

NS: No, do not make me follow those kids!

MM: Think about it. It's the perfect route. We know they end up in Sally's time by the end, right?

NS: I can't believe you've been working on this all this time. It's maddening. Andwho the hell are all these people across time to take down ODAR?

MM: For most of history they never met each other. Those that bother with a label call themselves the Anchorites. Worked at ODAR in completely different times in history. But they're putting their minds together and I think they can really put a stop to... all this.

NS: ...Are you one of them?

MM: It's crazy. I know. I have no idea if it'll even work. But if it can put a stop to ODAR, isn't it worth it?

NS: ...I have no idea how to build this schematic! I can't do it when I get to the other side!

MM: I'll show you how. From now on, at dawn, we practice. Every day. Until ODAR sends you back.

NS: You really think they're gonna listen to your recommendation?

MM: They...have to.

NS: Why?

MM: When I go back to the past for a year, again and again...don't you wonder what happens to the past me?

NS: Please don't tell me you go all Prestige on him.

MM: No, no. The thing is...past me is just sitting on his couch, wondering what he's going to do with his life. 30 years in the future.

NS: You haven't been born yet.

MM: ODAR is under strict orders to take orders from future agents. The future organization outranks the past, every time.

NS: That explains why you get all the cushy treatment. I definitely joined way before you.

MM: Hey! I just so happen to have been deprived of “cushy” treatment for a good year of my life, mister. Speaking of... thinking you could help with that?

NS: You’re a pig!

[[SFX: Nikhil and Mateo fall back on the bed; radio tuning;

MM: So you land on the Philadelphia shore.

NS: Sally Grissom rushes to my rescue.

MM: She can get you to Point of Exile. She’ll take you back there no matter what. Gain her trust, find out why she’s so important, and one night...just do the deed, if you must.

NS: Must I?

MM: Maintaining the cover that you’re cooperating with ODAR is your number one priority. Remember: if you’re compromised, ODAR learns of our plans–in the past–and can undo our work, and memories, at any moment. All this will have been for nothing.

NS: But if ODAR wants her dead, it could only be because she’s of use to us, right?

MM: She’s not useful in any way that matters to shutting down ODAR on our terms. If you tell her about any of this, you risk compromising all of our progress until this point.

NS: Wait, problem here. You said in the original generator this circuit is all the way on the other side.

MM: Yeah. You probably won’t be able to reach it by hand. If you wanna make the anchor point, you’ll need an extra pair of hands. Just trick some guard. Don’t count on Sally to do it.

NS: ... Oh my god, ODAR is going to kill me for even thinking about trying any of this!

MM: You’re a Doctor. You’re too valuable. Still, don’t ever let them find out about this. They might just go back and make sure you were never born. But yeah, you’ll be fine. We need doctors. I wonder why we have so few with all our funding.

NS: Probably because we swore to do no harm.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

OO: Doctor Sharma, come in.

NS: I thought my reevaluation wasn’t coming for another couple of weeks.

OO: Relax, I'm just going to ask you a question and we can evaluate from there.

NS: Uh–

OO: I take it you and Agent Morales are... close?

NS: I'm sorry, I—

OO: You know exactly well what I mean. You know, he doesn't have many trips left him. His last was supposed to be indeed his last journey back through time. It'd be unwise for his health.

NS: I'm sorry, I didn't hear a question.

OO: Would you like me to send your friend to his death? Or would you like to kill Sally Grissom?

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

MM: You know, one of the people who worked on this schematic? She had all these diary entries. I found one that she wrote towards the end of her life. She was hitting a wall with the schematics, nearing death, and she just didn't know what else to do. She felt like ODAR was winning, no matter what. And she wrote... this.

NS: "I see the beacons, dotting the arc of time, lighting the way to dawn." June Barlowe.

MM: Trust me, when things get dark, just remember that image. It gets you home. That's what kept me going. Now. Will you do it, Nikhil? Take us to the dawn?

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

OO: Doctor Sharma? Doctor Sharma. I'm sorry but time waits for no one in this case. I'm going to need an answer from you right away. Let me remind you this a great opportunity to prove you're a "values fit" here. A real team player. Now. Will you complete the mission, or will we have to send agent Morales?

NS: ...Yes. I'll do it.

[[SFX: tape recorder stops]]

Arjun Gupta (Nikhil Sharma)
Bernardo Cubría (Mateo Morales)
Jade Johnson (Future ODAR Officer)

Fight choreography and production help from Danielle Shemaiah. Original music by Mischa Stanton and by Eno Freedman-Brodmann.
ars PARADOXICA is brought to you by The Internet: Good news for people who love giving bad news.

14: Anchor

WRITTEN BY TAU ZAMAN
DIRECTED & SOUND DESIGN BY MISCHA STANTON

[[SFX: tape recorder starts; the recorder bobs below water; Sally drags Nikhil to the shore]]

SALLY GRISSOM (SG): What the hell?!

NIKHIL SHARMA (NS): Sally Grissom? You're Sally Grissom!

SG: What the shit? How do you know who I am?

NS: God… You aren't even going to ask me if I'm alright?

SG: I just saw you appear from thin air. If you know who I am, then you know I have every right to be just as paranoid as I damn well please. What are you doing here?

NS: How rude... I'm from… One moment

[[SFX: Nikhil vomits on Sally]]

SG: At least... turn your head away!

NS: I'm sorry I'll try to-

[[SFX: Nikhil vomits on Sally again]]

SG: Ugh…

NS: Okay, I'm done. Heh. Sorry about-

[[SFX: more vomiting]]

SG: OH MY GOD. There can't be anything left in you in you at this point! Wait a minute...

[[SFX: Sally grabs Nikhil's recorder]]

NS: Hey, that's mine!

SG: What the hell is his?

NS: It's my recorder!

SG: I know that, but it's too nice, too… New.

NS: Yes, well I was trying to explain–

SG: Where are you from? Or should I say, when are you from?

NS: Okay, if you could see yourself right now you'd be looking at the craziest eyes you've ever seen. Can you please just settle down and let me explain?

SG: Fine. Sorry. I just… I just always wanted to say that. When I first landed here, I was throwing up everywhere too and Whickman was a lot nicer to me about it.

NS: Whickman?

SG: Okay, I'm going to need some answers right now unless you want to go back in the drink.

NS: Dr. Nikhil Sharma, at your service. And at your mercy as well. Thank you for not letting me drown. And um, I landed here because… Sorry, my memory is suddenly lacking...

SG: Time travel's a bitch. Doctor, this recorder, your clothes... are you from 20[redacted]?!

NS: Yes!

SG: Landed here... nobody else has ever come here from that far in the future...

NS: And you're... Sally Grissom. I remember the pictures.

SG: Um, please don't touch my face?

NS: Is this Point-of-Exile?

SG: We're in Philadelphia. Why are you here? How do you know who I am?

NS: Listen, I'm happy to answer all these questions in due time, but first can you get me some–

[[SFX: Nikhil vomits yet again, then faints]]

SG: Doctor? Dr. Sharma? ...Happens to everyone their first time.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

SG: Partridge! Partridge, you won't believe this, but I just found someone! He just landed here from the future. Like me. He had a recorder on him. I think the water messed it up, I can't tell if it's still recording. Maybe you could look into getting it working again? I wanna see what's on it. I need to

know what this guy's up to before he wakes up again. I'll call you when I find out more.

[[SFX: Sally hangs up; puts more money into payphone, then dials]]

CONCIERGE: Thank you for calling the Gold Anchor this is–

SG: Hi, room 222 please.

CONCIERGE: ...And a very pleasant hello, to you, too, miss. Please, hold for just… one… moment…

SG: [sigh]

[[SFX: phone rings]]

ER: This is Esther Roberts.

SG: Roberts! I'm so glad I caught you.

ER: Sally? Where are you?

SG: Yeah, that's the thing. Roberts, I'm sorry, I'm really glad you brought me out here and all, but, um... I can't come back with you just yet. Um, well, you see, it's just that, um, I want to spend a few extra days in New York!

ER: Huh?

SG: Yeah, you know. See some plays. Go see Times Square before it's covered in–

ER: Didn't you do that already? Sally, where have you been?

SG: It doesn't matter, listen, please just go. I'll be back in Colorado soon enough.

ER: That's fine, Sally.

SG: ...Roberts? You sound...are you alright? Did something happen?

ER: [sigh] It's fine. It's nothing. I can't make you do anything you don't want to do. Goodbye, Sally.

[[SFX: Esther hangs up; Sally follows; Nikhil approaches]]

SG: Okay, that was weird....

NS: So you're free!

SG: You bounce back fast.

[[SFX: Nikhil produces a flyer]]

NS: Sally, look at this! Bobby Castellini at the Library Bar, Rittenhouse Hotel. Do you like jazz?

SG: Listen, we really don't have much time–

NS: Look, I'll tell you everything you need to know, but I'm going to faint–again–if I don't get something to eat. Besides, we're in 1949! We could be listening to the greats in real time! We could go find young Sinatra!

SG: No, I don't think he's a thing yet. But we do need a place to stay, and I'd like to rinse all the... this... off of me.

NS: Sorry.

SG: Everyone does it their first time. I think you may have set a record though… A hotel might not be a bad idea.

[[SFX: radio tuning; hotel bar]]

NS: And as far as I can tell, the geospatial target failed so the system defaulted to send me to the spatial coordinates of the anchor point.

SG: Fancy. You're lucky it didn't send you into the upper atmosphere. Or worse, like deep space.

NS: Oh that doesn't happen anymore. The Timepiece has benefitted from the extra seven decades of work.

SG: So you're an ODAR agent. Huh, I guess they really do stick it out for the long haul. Why were you sent back here?

NS: That part… is a little harder to recall. You know, trying to remember is like grasping at fog. You get trained for this kind of stuff but wow! I really don't know how anyone remembers! I'm sure it'll come to me.

SG: ...You really don't remember?

NS: I can tell you about the cereal I ate this morning. Other than that... nothing.

SG: I know the feeling. The Timepiece puts you through a blender. But you'll be pining for the future soon enough.

NS: I won't miss it. Not much left for me in 20[redacted].

SG: That's what I thought too. But you will. Trust me.

NS: You've been here, what, six years now? You don't seem a total wreck. Yet.

SG: You get used to the day-to-day, but, I dunno, sometimes you just, remember things, little things. I would be working on the Timepiece and start looking for a sticky note to quickly write something down, and of course we don't have those yet. You can't just put on whatever music you want, whenever you want. I miss being able to do that. And it's so quiet...

NS: I don't know. If this one bar here in 1949 is any empirical evidence, the music's a lot better. Plus, they don't make drinks nearly as strong as hi in our day. I choose the here and now.

SG: To the here, and now.

[[SFX: tape fast-forward]]

SG: –Handheld calculators! Who knew I would miss those so much. Couldn't you have brought some of those?

NS: I've got some lemon drops, if you want candy… [laugh]

SG: [laugh] ...What's the deal with that waitress?

NS: What do you mean?

SG: She keeps scrunching her nose at you.

NS: Oh. I get that face from all kinds of people. I guess I'm the only one here who, well...

SG: Looks like you?

NS: That's one way of putting it.

SG: So. Dr. Nikhil Sharma. Where's that accent from? Kinda British, kinda Indian?

NS: I was born in Lahore, studied at Oxford. But the accent? It's kind of a hodge-podge of all the places I've lived, you know?

SG: ODAR goes worldwide, huh?

NS: You don't stop talking about work, do you?

[[SFX: tape fast-forward]]

NS: *(drunk)* –Honestly? Honestly, if my only time traveling legacy was to erase whoever decided to invent Internet comment sections, I could live with that!

SG: [laughs]

[[SFX: Nikhil falls over]]

NS: ...You're drinking me under the table!

SG: ...Excuse me, you're way ahead of me!

[[SFX: tape fast-forward]]

SG: *(imitating)* Oh, my dear, you haven't been to Chichen Itza? Dahling, you simply must go to Chichen Itza!

NS: She was trying so hard to sound *(imitating)* Continental. I studied haberdashery under Deveraux in Milan! [laughs]

SG: [laughs] Well, um… This is my room.

NS: Oh, and this one right here's mine.

SG: Well, look at hat! We should get some sleep, we'll have to drive back tomorrow.

NS: Drive? Why not fly?

SG: You know how expensive plane tickets are these days? I'm not made of money, and it doesn't seem like you brought a sports almanac with you.

NS: Haha, that's a good one. You know now that I think on it, driving might be preferable to flying after all. A small road trip of sorts. It would give me some time to get my memory back before I see the folks in charge.

SG: You're just making excuses!

NS: No but you're right. Let's just drive. It can't be more than a couple of days. We can see the great American Midwest! Besides, we're having fun, right?

SG: You know what? You're right. I can't remember letting loose like this since, like, Vegas!

NS: All the more reason.

SG: Yeah!

NS: Why don't you get out more?

SG: I don't know, people just... I can't believe I'm even telling you this, this is definitely the booze talking, but… I dunno, sometimes I feel like everyone always handles me like...like I have to be carefully kept. I can't tell who's being nice to me just because they're nice, and who's being nice to me just because they're trying to milk whatever's in my brain to keep building the Timepiece. They treat me like I've got… sharp edges.

NS: Really? That can't be true! Well I, for one, just so happen to like your edges.

SG: That's… oddly sweet.

NS: I mean maybe they could use little sanding?

SG: Jerk.

NS: Hey! I am coming with you on a road trip.

SG: Because you don't have a choice!

NS: It'll be just like one of those road trip movies!

SG: Ugh, I hate that genre. Corny music, clichéd stories...

NS: I love road trip movies! The characters always end up back at home where they started, but as people they're forever changed! I can't get enough of them. I even liked Crossroads.

SG: With Britney Spears?

NS: Uh–Crossroads had Mandy Moore.

SG: Not in my timeline… whoever! Love 'em all you want, I'm just saying that going on a road trip might be kinda nice, despite it being our only choice.

NS: Hey, what's that?

SG: Oh. My recorder. Not as fancy as yours.

NS: It looks like it's still on.

SG: Yeah. Oops, I must've accidentally hit the button or something. I guess–

NS: Maybe we could, um… Maybe we could give this recorder a break for a bit.

[[SFX: Nikhil approaches Sally]]

SG: Um. No, why would I do that?

NS: Oh. Sorry, I–

SG: Oh, uh… No. Thanks, but... No, I'm... I'm just gonna take a look at a map and get our route started!

NS: Of course. I'll let you work on that. Catch you for breakfast?

SG: Yeah, sounds good. Get some sleep.

NS: I will. You should too, when you're done with all that, er, mapping. And thanks for saving my life again, by the way. So. Sweet dreams, Sally Grissom.

SG: Goodnight, Dr. Sharma.

[[SFX: radio tuning; car radio plays "Will the Circle Be Unbroken"]]

SG: Today is October 30, 1949. Dr. Nikhil Sharma and I are on day of our drive from Philadelphia to Point-of-Exile, Colorado. I have to say, this actually isn't a half bad idea. I'm getting to see this whole side of America I never really got to see. Ever since I landed on the Eldridge I was kind of just getting shuttled from one prison to the next. It really is a whole 'nother world out here.

Pretty sparse on the road. Most of the time it's just us, not another driver in sight. And trees, and hills, and plains for miles. It's...beautiful, really. Feels strange saying that, but that's the only way to describe it.

That's not to say it's been all sunshine. It rained pretty hard yesterday, and, frankly, my road trip partner isn't the best navigator.

NS: Hey!

SG: We ended up taking a wrong turn and, instead of making our way through the great state of Indiana, we found ourselves accidentally driving through the… adequate state of Kentucky.

NS: If we hadn't done that we wouldn't have gotten to try old-school Kentucky fried chicken! The real deal! Before they add all those hormones.

SG: Personally I'm of the suspicion that Doctor Sharma here is actually trying to detour us to stop at very single tourist trap he sees advertised on a billboard.

NS: Excuse me, they're not tourist traps; the correct term is "roadside attractions."

SG: It's been a lot of sightseeing, and grabbing meals at truck stops and hokey diners.

NS: [laughs] The last one

SG: Okay that last one was definitely the worst!

NS: –My favorite!

SG: Wait, wait, just do the voice again!

NS: Which one, that boy who walked up to us or his mother?

SG: The kid!

NS: *(imitating)* Gee, mister. I know about white men and black men but a brown man? Now I've really seen 'em all! [laughs]

SG: [laughs] You were so nice about it! I would have no idea how to respond to that.

NS: I had no idea how to respond to his other!

SG: Oh you mean when she saw you? *(imitating)* Well aren't you just a hot plate o'curry!

[[SFX: something slams into the windshield; Sally swerves]]

SG: What the-

NS: The hell was that?

SG: Something hit the windshield. I couldn't see it in time.

NS: Did you catch where it came from?

SG: It must've been pretty big, look at that crack.

NS: Wait, I think it's coming from that car in front of us. Look out!

[[SFX: another impact; Sally swerves]]

SG: A beer bottle? re they trying to kill us or something?

NS: ...That is a distinct possibility.

SG: ...Oh COME ON Sharma.

NS: So, this isn't exactly the best time to tell you this, but maybe I haven't been very forthright with you, Sally?

SG: Literally the first thing I asked you! Come on dude!

NS: You know how I couldn't remember my mission from ODAR? Well, my mission was supposed to be to kill you.

SG: You're here to ill me?

[[SFX: Sally breaks; punches Nikhil]]

NS: Hey! Hey! Calm down! I'm not gonna do it!

SG: How am I supposed to believe you?

NS: I don't know! They want me dead, too! I didn't leave 20[redacted] on such good terms, I'll have you know.

SG: What are you talking about?

NS: Listen, I'll explain everything, but this is not the time for exposition!

SG: Do you have anything we can use?

NS: Um, just some packets of crisps and a large abundance of lemon drops!

SG: Sharma! Of all the things to stuff your pockets with before jumping back in time—

NS: Excuse me, I didn't expect to be in a car fight!

[[SFX: Sally shifts gears; accelerates]]

NS: Sally, what are you doing! Turn around!

SG: They want to kill me, they better not miss!

NS: Do you have a death wish or something?!

SG: I don't know, let's find out!

[[SFX: Sally accelerates toward the oncoming car; the other car swerves off the road; Sally continues driving]]

SG: Aw, hell yes! Suck it, ODAR! I made you! You wouldn't be here if it weren't for me! Literally! Because of physics! Whew! What a rush. Anyway, about this trying to kill me business?

NS: Uhhh.... uhh...

[[SFX: tape fast-forward]]

SG: What do you mean, not anymore?

NS: Well I don't know about now, but by my time ODAR is not the most ethical of government agencies.

SG: Hah! Let me guess. Like the NSA and the FBI all rolled into one, spread across time like butter on toast?

NS: What's the NSA? We don't have that.

SG: Yeah, that tracks.

NS: I found out some of the things they were doing, and why, and I just... couldn't abide that anymore.

SG: It's ODAR. What did you think you were getting into?

NS: Protection! I thought this was about course correction. Fixing disasters, last resort sort of deals. Not...

SG: You better not even tell me. I thought Roberts was supposed to fix this!

NS: Who?

SG: Esther Roberts, she's head of R&D now? Chief advisor to Director Whickman?

NS: Chet Whickman is dead.

SG: Oh... Yeah, I guess he would be.

NS: I planned to leave about a year before departure, but... I was approached by this group. Listen, Sally... ODAR sent me here to kill you, but... I'm here to bring you back with me.

SG: Nope. Bullshit. Actually not possible. Don't pull that–

NS: Listen, just listen. We just need a second anchor point, like the Eldridge. Believe me, this could really work!

SG: … I'm sorry, I just can't take your word. You're gonna need to explain the physics on this one if you want my help.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

NS: This is Dr. Nikhil Sharma. Today is November 2nd, 1949. Here it is. The very end of the road. And this might be my last recording ever, if I die here. As long as our plan succeeds, I can live with that. Do we need to go over it again?

SG: No, I've got it. The hardest part will be these guards out front. Once we get to the Rainbow generators, I can lock us in.

NS: Okay, just barrel into there, get out of the car, and speak confidently.

SG: Relax, I can do this.

NS: Fine, no fine! It's just...

SG: Just what?

NS: You're not a very good liar, is all.

SG: You wouldn't know! You've never seen me lie!

NS: Haven't I?

[[SFX: Sally pulls up]]

SG: ...We're not far now.

NS: Sally, you've been here six years. The fact that you've been able to last this long without going utterly mad is a testament to your resilience. I can't say it'll be easy, but I'm sure of it: once you come back to 20[redacted], you il adjust. You il find friends again. Think about it. Friends who get your jokes! And understand your references! And can actually match the breadth of your scientific knowledge!

SG: Sometimes when I think back on my life before, working on my research at MIT... It all just feels like a dream. Like this is the real world now.

NS: This is the dream. Your world is waiting for you. When the time comes, just be ready to leave behind whatever you've got here.

SG: I can't believe it. I'm actually going back. If I want to return to 1949 though, why can't we just make an anchor point to come back here whenever we want?

NS: Traveling across time is sure to kill you, if done too many times. We're just making this anchor point so that future agents can use it, one at a time, and build out new ones.

SG: Okay... You ready?

NS: Yes. I don't mean to rush you, but there's no way those agents wouldn't know we're coming here. They may still be coming for us this very moment.

SG: It's fine. I can do this. Here we go!

[[SFX: Sally drives up to the station, then brakes hard; she exits the car and storms up to the guards]]

SG: No time to explain. The generator is going to blow any minute. Get Chet Whickman here, right now!... NOW! What part of "blow any minute" don't you mindless grunts understand?! Doctor! With me!

[[SFX: Nikhil exits the car as the guards run past]]

NS: That was really nice work!

SG: I hope ODAR never gets smarter than this.

NS: They do. By a lot.

SG: That's it right there in the window.

NS: Wow, look at that old thing. Hey, troublemaker!

[[SFX: Sally picks the lock]]

SG: Lemme just this door open... You really think you can make this work?

NS: We've had years to work it out, Sally. Don't worry.

[[SFX: gunshots in distance]]

SG: No way. They're here already? I'm still working on this door! Dammit.

NS: They're happy to make any mess in Point-of-Exile to get to us.

SG: I thought they didn't wanna kill anyone but me?

NS: They're clearly ready to kill a lot of people now! The plan's changed. I haven't exactly been getting the more up-to-date briefings!

[[SFX: Sally throws the lock]]

SG: Okay, got it! Get in, get in, quick!

NS: Hurry, that desk over there. Block the door.

[[SFX: Sally and Nikhil drag a desk in front of the door]]

SG: The generator! Go!

NS: I'm on it!

[[SFX: Nikhil sets to work; pounding at the door; gunshots]]

SG: Dr. Sharma, they're here. You need to be done in 10 seconds because they're gonna be–

NS: I'll be done in five…

[[SFX: Nikhil throws a switch; the generator sparks]]

NS: Got it! Okay, Sally, I need you to close this circuit on the other side.

SG: I can't, I'm trying to keep this door closed!

NS: It'll take only a second. Just run here, you can make it!

CHET WHICKMAN (CW): *(behind the door)* Sally? It's Chet. What on God's green earth is going on? Open this door!

NS: Sally. NOW!

SG: Okay, okay, okay!

NS: That cable right there!

SG: Got it.

NS: Sally, close the circuit.

[[SFX: Chet pounds on the door]]

NS: Sally!

SG: I can't do it! I can't leave. I'm not ready yet.

NS: Sally, this is not the time to be having second thoughts! Do it now!

SG: I'm sorry! But there's still work to be done in the past. This s home now! Roberts and Whickman… whatever ODAR becomes, I need to make sure they don't let it turn out that way!

NS: Sally, this is the way! You make the anchor point, and bam: ODAR loses its grip over history. They'll no longer have a singular point in history to keep revisiting every time they want to make a change. Other people can tamper with it, from anywhere on the timeline there's an anchor! We free the world from ODAR's clutches! Please, Sally, close the circuit. Come home.

[[SFX: Chet bursts through the door; shoots Nikhil]]

SG: [scream]

CW: Sally, you've got some explaining to do!

SG: Sharma!

NS: Call me...Nikhil.

CW: Get the hell away from him.

NS: That's...quite the shot...

SG: I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I just, I'm responsible, and I...

NS: The-the anchor...

SG: Please, we can get you patched, we can try again.

NS: ...It's not done.

SG: You're right. I can still close the circ–

[[SFX: Chet fires three rounds at the generator, which spins down]]

SG: What the fuck Whickman?!

CW: Sally, you need to back away now.

NS: Find...

CW: Sally, I said, step aside!

SG: Whickman will you shut the hell up! I can't hear him. You win! Plan foiled. I just want to hear him. Nikhil, find what?

NS: [gurgle]...Barlowe...

SG: What?

NS: [gurgle]...Barlowe...

CW: Barlowe? Quentin Barlowe is very dead.

NS: I see the beacons… dotting the arc of time… lighting the way to dawn.

SG: Beacons, arc of time, way to dawn. Got it. And you can tell me what that means tomorrow. Come on, Nikhil, come on, don't die...

NS: Sally...?

SG: Nikhil, just hold on, okay?

NS: ...When I dropped in the water...

SG: Y-yeah?

NS: ...I knew...I had to kill you....

SG: Save your breath.

OBJ**NS:** ...But then you pulled me out...and there you were....

SG: Whickman, get a medic in here!

NS: ....all sun, and salt, and sand...

SG: Nikhil, just stop talking, please.

NS: .....what luck. [fights for breath] Sally?

SG: Whickman, please!

NS: Some...road trip, huh...?

SG: Nikhil...? Nikhil! Stay with me. Don't fall asleep...

NS: At least… you're home.

SG: Whickman, why are you just standing there? Move! Come on! Nikhil, Nikhil stay with me, don't fall asleep. Stay with wme. Nikhil! Come on!

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

SG: *(on phone)* ...I'll call you when I find out more.

ANTHONY PARTRIDGE (AP): You found someone? Who's from the future? What's his name. I can look him up.

[[SFX: tape fast-forward]]

AP: Hi, Sally. Just checking in, you should get this a day after we last spoke. Oh! Happy belated "reversary," I guess. If you could get me the name of the guy who had a Timepiece, I'm pretty sure can give you relevant information. Otherwise, I'm just gonna sit here. For the rest of my life. Like… forever. Anyway. Get it to me when you can.

[[SFX: tape fast-forward]]

AP: So you're not dead or vanished, or I'd have heard, but I've got no clue where you're supposed to be these next few days. Anyway, I'm here. So you know.

[[SFX: Anthony types]]

AP: What's keeping her?

[[SFX: alert beep]]

AP: Finally!

SG: *(on phone)* [sniff] Um, hey. Made it back to Colorado. Everything is... everything is the worst. I'm in a bad place. Think I'm gonna talk to Roberts about that shrink. I'll call you later.

AP: ...Well, shit. Now I need to know about our mystery man from 20[redacted]. Where he came from. Other than 20[redacted], I mean.

[[SFX: tape fast-forward]]

AP: So I went through every correspondence, every piece of tech in here, every memo and label stuck on furniture. You know what I found? Nothing, not a single item, was from 20[redacted]. I found a dossier in here marked '96... but….

Why doesn't anyone from ODAR communicate with me past the nineties? It's as if Sally's time is the farthest out I can see, even with my best predictions and guesses. Not a sound from anybody out there. It's a bit eerie.

What happens in the two thousands that blocks even my view into it? Something big. Something must have happened in ODAR to make them radio silent. I don't know what it is.

Throw that on the pile of mysteries.

[[SFX: tape recorder stops]]

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ars PARADOXICA is created by Daniel Manning and Mischa Stanton.
Episode 14: Anchor features –

Kristen DiMercurio (Sally Grissom)
Reyn Beeler (Chet Whickman)
Katie Speed (Esther Roberts)
Robin Gabrielli (Anthony Partridge)
Arjun Gupta (Nikhil Sharma)
Conrad Miszuk (additional voices)
with special thanks to Isabel Atkinson

Production help from Danielle Shemaiah. Original music by Mischa Stanton and by Eno Freedman-Brodmann. Additional music by the US Army Blues via the Free Music Archive.
ars PARADOXICA is brought to you by The Internet: Not quite the Matrix, but pretty close.

22 22 13 05 23 06 14 13 | 14 16 06 21 22 17 | 18 25 05 21 | 22 17 | 20 18 03 06 06 22 04
WEATHER: rainy

15: Butterfly

WRITTEN BY DANIEL MANNING & MISCHA STANTON
DIRECTED & SOUND DESIGN BY MISCHA STANTON

[[SFX: tape recorder starts]]

SALLY GRISSOM (SG): Diary of Sally Grissom. November 18, 1949. First diary on the new recorder. I haven't really talked to anyone except this diary since... since a while. Uh… Still can't bring myself to, um, to step outside. I don't... I don't want to mess anything up. Again.

Sometimes I think the universe has it out for me, y'know? It's like the past pushes back at me because it's angry at all the stuff I've done since I left my proper place in time. I think of all the things that have gone wrong, and how everything that gets thrown back in my face. Then I remember that the past can't push back and instead, the grand dumpster fire of life and the tragedy of physics just more or less suck! At least the universe doesn't give a shit about me!

God, even when I think I can finally do things for the right reasons it all goes to hell! I try to do some good, to bring a little right to world with so much wrong and I...

It wasn't just Sharma. I mean, who knows where Partridge or Barlowe or Wyatt or Whickman, or any of them would be, how much better off they might have been without me. Wow, am I this much of a downer in public? Jeez.

Roberts has been to see me a couple of times. Despite what I've said about her, despite whatever Esther-genda she may have, it is nice when she checks in on me. But lately she's been on me to see this doctor, some psychologist she's had on file. And I know. I know that mental health is serious business, I know seeking help is nothing to be ashamed of, and yeah okay maybe I'm a little... frayed at the edges. But I can't, I just can't take the responsibility of touching another person's life. I can't keep throwing stones in the pond when all the ripples turn into tidal waves! I have to do everything I can, from here on out, to contain my effect. To minimize the damage. To not rope anyone new into my world.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

MAGGIE ELBOURNE (ME): This is Maggie Elbourne, I am a research assistant to Dr. Aldous Carling. And these are my notes on the new behavioral analysis report commissioned by the US Office of Developed Anomalous Resources. I've been instructed to record detailed notes about the study as well as my own thoughts on the process. So, here is Tape 1: Description and Background.

ODAR has commissioned us to design and run a series of tests to examine the effect of a new piece of... equipment, on the human psyche. This machine, codenamed Timepiece, I... Even now I hesitate to put my full faith in the documentation, but I suppose I must if we're to get anything done. They have sent along the ￼pieces of a machine which, when activated, will transport objects backwards in time. I expressed my disbelief to Dr. Carling that such a thing was even possible. I would rather be stuffed back into Records & Archives than have my time wasted on a fool's errand. However, Dr. Carling reassures me that this machine does indeed do what it says on the tin. And I can't very well design an experiment around this machine without first accepting its premise as truth. So I shall.

I should state again that this study was commissioned by a government agency, for the purposes of examining the efficacy of this machine for use during wartime. I wish that... That this were not the case. But science is the sails, not the rudder, and I can only research what I've been asked to research. At least... For now.

The agency's documentation refers to, and here I quote, "adverse effects on the mental state of the operator over prolonged or heavy use." And it is here that I begin. I must observe these adverse effects if I am to present a detailed report.

[[SFX: radio tuning; writing; stands, opens door; "Primavera"]]

SG: No, I should just go–

DR. FITZGERALD (DR.F): Miss Sally Grissom?

SG: Doctor–ah, dammit...

DR.F: Of course, excuse me Dr. Grissom. I'm Dr. Fitzgerald. Come in.

SG: Actually, Dr. Fitzgerald, I was just thinking that.... I didn't need to see you anyway.

DR.F: Sally, We are often unaware of how much help we truly need until it's offered...

SG: No no. I've said too much already. I shouldn't even be here, I'm sure–

DR.F: Sally. You're already in my office. You have an appointment. I've got nothing but time for you.

[[SFX: Sally enters the office]]

SG: You've got no idea how right you are, Doc.

DR.F: What do you mean by that?

￼**SG:** ...I don't want to talk about it. I'm sorry I brought it up.

DR.F: Okay. That's fine. We can talk about whatever you like. Is it alright if I call you Sally?

SG: I guess so.

DR.F: Sally, what brought you in to see me today?

SG: Well, um... I...

DR.F: Take a moment to compose your thoughts.

SG: ...I've been afraid to leave my house lately. Or rather, my house and front porch and driveway up to the mailbox...

DR.F: And yet, here you are.

SG: know. I know! Here I am. This is the first day in... A while. Days.

DR.F: How many?

SG: I'm not really sure–

DR.F: Sally. I appreciate that you've got your own secrets. Things you're not willing to share with me. Why would you? We've only just met. But if you're going to lie to me, then this is not going to work. Remember, all of this stays strictly between us.

SG: ...Three weeks.

DR.F: That is... that is quite a while. What changed your mind today?

SG: Roberts threatened to stop bringing me groceries.

DR.F: I remember speaking with Ms. Roberts. She's... very thorough. Do you think she would do it?

SG: Yeah. Yeah I do. Roberts is sweet, but she's... Got a cold streak.

DR.F: I believe you.

SG: And truth be told, I can be a little stubborn.

DR.F: You wouldn't be the first person to hesitate pursuing psychotherapy.

SG: Yeah, but at least I'll admit that I could use some help. So I'm here. But I wish I wasn't.

DR.F: Why is that?

SG: I wish I wasn't taking your time. Displacing your time.

DR.F: That's called "scheduling."

SG: No. I'm not making myself clear. What would you be doing right now, if I hadn't made my appointment for today?

DR.F: Well, I imagine I'd be working on my notes for other patients here at my desk.

SG: Okay. So you would've gotten notes taken care of, and your day would have ended an hour earlier. Say, 6 instead of 7.

DR.F: That's alright Sally, I've got plenty of time–

SG: You'd get out of work at 6, then you get home around 6:20, cook yourself some dinner. The heat rising from your stove mixes with the air and creates a thermal pocket. A hawk flying over your house catches the thermal pocket and rides it up over the treetops and sees its own dinner, a field mouse. Hawk hunts the mouse, mouse is dead. Hawk is eating dinner, you're eating dinner. Everything's nice. But: you're here with me. Your notes take you an extra hour. You won't cook dinner until 7:20. The hawk misses the thermal, the mouse survives to run inside a house, some gingham-clad white-picket housewife jumps up on the table, slips and breaks her neck. Bang, my presence in your office has killed another innocent person!

DR.F: ...Another?

SG: I've already got enough blood on my hands. Enough for a lifetime. I don't need any more.

DR.F: ...I'd like to revisit the blood thing later, but I'd like to ask you a question. What if during my late drive home, I run over the same mouse with my car?

SG: Huh?

DR.F: Maybe, if I go home earlier, a truck that runs a red light hits me on the highway. What if the hawk's full belly further devastates the mouse population here? What if that housewife was just he worst, and deserved a quick death?

SG: [chuckle] She would have to really deserve it...

DR.F: What I'm saying, Sally, is that there is much that's out of your control here. You didn't just appear in the world today, out of the blue. You've affected the people around you throughout your entire life. You can't control everything, and you shouldn't let yourself worry about what you can't control.

SG: Hah! You know what happened to the last person who said that to me? He ended up locked in a CAGE for the rest of his life.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

ME: Maggie Elbourne, experiment #1. December 14, 1949. I have with me here my first subject, Kronos. Say hi, Kronos.

[[SFX: mouse in cage]]

ME: To begin, I have conditioned Kronos's behavior over the past week to press a button when he is hungry. Over the week he has simply received food when the button is pressed. Today, I will be modifying the mechanism. Instead of releasing food, the button will now start a timer, set for 1 hour. Once the countdown reaches zero, the Timepiece will activate and emit radiation back through time, as I understand it, with a unique radiation signature. I have rigged up a sensor to the food release, and the food will be released only when it receives the signature. The intent is to create a version of events where Kronos is not fed and remains hungry, and a rewritten version of events, wherein by the estimation of our little pioneer here, all will proceed as usual. Hopefully this is enough to induce the adverse effects of time travel, and then I can proceed from there.

[[SFX: mouse in cage]]

ME: Come on, it's been nearly an hour by now. Is this thing even worki–

[[SFX: Timepiece activates; radio tuning]]

ME: Experiment results. After 1 week of button-activated Timepiece activity, Kronos seems no worse for wear. His mood is stable, he remains full of energy. His weight is the same. By all accounts, Kronos is as healthy as when he came in. I conclude that it takes more than a simple change in one's temporal environment to induce ill effects. Now with the basics out of the way, I'll have to try a different tactic.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

DR.F: How was your week, Sally?

SG: It was okay. I guess.

DR.F: Did you do what we talked about?

SG: Yeah. I did.

DR.F: And?

SG: It kinda... backfired.

DR.F: What do you mean?

SG: Well, I was trying to get out and talk to people, like you said. Just ordinary conversation. Listen to people. Learn about their lives, see that

people could interact with me and not get... derailed. But I went to buy groceries, and the cashier... Well, he was one of my Callers.

DR.F: Hm. And how was your interaction?

SG: He said he phoned me, and missed hearing my voice.

DR.F: And how did you feel about that? Meeting with an ex-boyfriend can be very stressful.

SG: ...What?

DR.F: Well, you said that he was one of your gentleman callers...

SG: Oh, hah, no no no. I don't really go in for that sort of thing.

DR.F: You don't go in for what, love? Or romantic relationships?

SG: That's never really been my scene.

DR.F: Sally, we all deserve–

SG: I'm gonna stop you right there, Doc. I'm perfectly happy without somebody in my life. I'm not "incomplete" just because I don't feel like having a man telling me what to do. He wasn't a "gentleman caller."

DR.F: Then what did you mean?

SG: Up until a few weeks ago I had this machine, the Answertron,. I recorded messages for me whenever I couldn't come to the phone. And it was this novelty in town. People would call my house just to hear it. Apparently this cashier was one of those guys.

DR.F: Okay. So he used to call your Answermajig–

SG: Answertron. Yeah. During the coma, I guess he used to call it a bunch. He met his wife when he overheard her talking about it. While I was out in the coma, they got hitched.

DR.F: ...Oh.

SG: Yep. I guess I... introduced them, in a way. They'd have never met if I wasn't here, in the...

DR.F: In the past?

SG: ...Roberts told you.

DR.F: She considered that the last time you saw a psychologist who didn't know about your, ah, "unique position," that he ended up trying to have you

committed. I was waiting for you to tell me on your own. I hope you don't mind.

SG: It's my burden. I've been here six years now. I've mostly gotten used to it. How do you feel about it?

DR.F: I'll admit, I thought that either she was delusional, or you were. But our mutual friend was able to back up your story, so either you are, or this is an episode of The Candid Microphone and I'd like it very much if Mr. Funt would reveal himself.

SG: If this is an elaborate hoax, that's news to me and also quite possibly the worst thing anybody's ever done to me. I must be an oddity among your patients, huh?

DR.F: Actually, Sally, what you're going through seems highly relatable. You've been exiled from your homeland–

SG: Point-of-Exiled–

DR.F: –And you're cut off from your culture, from seeing your old friends and family. Your language is different, your ideals and values are alien to us. You might have a more complicated history than a foreigner you may pass on the street, but it's no less a familiar narrative.

SG: So you're saying I'm boring?

DR.F: I don't know. Perhaps you could tell me the story of how you came to be here in the past?

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

ME: Maggie Elbourne, experiment #2, January 3, 1950. With me today is my latest subject Hermes. Hermes has been trained to run this maze. At the center of the maze is a button, which will activate the Timepiece. The Timepiece is set to send radiation back 15 minutes from the time the button is pressed. Once the sensor detects this, synchronized of course to the specific radiation signature, it will open the cage door and Hermes will begin to run the maze. In the control testing, Hermes' average maze time was down to 2 minutes and seven seconds.

This experiment will track Hermes's maze completion time when exposed to minor fluctuations in personal history, namely the variable gate time of the maze. The Timepiece's fixed transmission interval will allow me to record the maze completion time no matter what iteration of the test is being run, as I myself will not be able to distinguish between the iterations. These experiments sure do get complicated quickly.

I will instigate a manual release of the timegate at 4:30 PM.

[[SFX: tape fast-forward; stopwatch ticking]]

ME: Okay, it's almost time... T-minus 5...4...3...2...1...

[[SFX: buzzer]]

ME: 4:30 mark. And there he goes!

[[SFX: radio tuning; buzzer]]

ME: Oh, and he's off! Mark gate time at 4:17 and 10 seconds. That's 2 minutes 10 seconds for the first run.

[[SFX: radio tuning; buzzer]]

ME: Oh, and there he goes! Mark gate time at 4:04 and 28 seconds. That makes this the second run, average 2 minutes 14 seconds.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

ME: –Third run, average 2 minutes 21 seconds–

[[SFX: radio tuning; static distortion]]

ME: –Fourth run I think?Average... 2 minutes 30 seconds.

[[SFX: radio tuning; static distortion]]

ME: –Would be the fifth run... He's... Hmm. Hermes seems to bumping into the walls quite a lot. He…

[[SFX: Hermes bumps into walls]]

ME: Oh my, that was rather hard, I... Oh Hermes!

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

ME: That makes this the fifth run, and... No, it can't be five, with only a 5--minutes gain? He can't have solved the maze 5 times in less than 5 minutes...This must be... Oh my, Hermes!

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

ME: Oh, and there he goes! Mark gate time at 3:13 and 25 seconds. That makes this the... Hermes? He... He's not moving...

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

ME: Experiment results. By my calculations, Hermes was able to run the maze seven times before becoming incapacitated, with an average run time of 4 minutes and 3 seconds. Even this average is well beyond the control data, and I have to assume that the decay became worse over time– that is, each iteration of the maze run, until Hermes became overwhelmed. Well, I'm

looking for tangible results of the adverse effects of the Timepiece... I suppose finding Hermes dead at the starting line is exactly what I asked for.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

SG: –And he looks at his hand, and it's like, slowly fading away? And nobody gets what he's playing, except the guitar player who calls up his cousin Chuck, and he's Chuck Berry, and you–

DR.F: Sally, Sally, I know how important movies are to you, but do you think you could answer my question?

SG: Which was?

DR.F: Why do you think your presence in the past has made the world objectively worse?

SG: What even is "worse," anyway? Listen, an optimist hopes this is the best of all possible worlds. A pessimist knows it is. And as much as I try to op that my time machine will make the world a better place, I no that it's brought nothing but pain to anybody. Including me! Especially me!

DR.F: You said "your" time machine. Do you still feel ownership over the Timepiece?

SG: Of course I do! All of this happened because of me. I built the damn thing in 20[redacted], and then built it again in 1945. I pored over obscure orbital mechanics equations for hou– ...oh my god!

DR.F: What?

SG: When I was building the Timepiece I never factored in the expansion of the universe!

DR.F: I don't know what you mean… You made a mistake building the Timepiece?

SG: Yes! Of course! How did I not catch that? How did Roberts not catch that? Wow, I... I can't believe it worked anyway. Sorry, got distracted. Where was I?

DR.F: You were talking about feeling like the Timepiece is yours. Does it feel like a burden to you?

SG: So many people have gotten hurt because of me. Some of them died. Bill Donovan would be alive today if it weren't for me. So yeah, it feels like a burden.

DR.F: From what you've said, it seems like the conflict between Bill and Anthony had nothing to do with you. They worked together before you came here. Is it possible that similar events could have happened without you?

SG: Yes, but I made it worse. My presence might not cause harm, but it certainly catalyzes it. [[SFX: radio tuning]]

ME: Maggie Elbourne, Timepiece experiment #3, February 8, 1950. With full proof that time travel has a nonzero effect on the behavior of mice, I have struggled to design an experiment that will allow me to further explore the cause and effect (if it can be so called) of the symptoms without causing harm to an astounding number of lab mice. I am... Uncomfortable with hurting a living thing if it can be avoided. I have raised my concerns to Dr. Carling, but he seemed unperturbed. He "advised" me to continue the work. He told me very succinctly that I won't get anywhere in this world if I'm not willing to get my hands a little dirty. Believe me, Dr. Carling, the veiled threat did not go unnoticed.

I don't know if he expects me not to talk about this on the record. But I don't scare that easily. So, for whatever authority to whom this is reported: If I do not continue on with these experiments, my career will be buried. I don't know if anyone listening to this cares much about that. But I won't roll over and be told to abandon my life's work. And so... I hope that serves as justification for what I am about to do.

This experiment was instituted in three phases, on 3 subject mice: Clotho, Lachesis and Atropos, the three Fates, as well as 3 partner mice.

Phase 1: I trained each of the mice to receive food after pressing a button.

Phase 2: For each subject mouse, a partner was introduced in an adjoining cage. The button placed in the partner cage would reward the partner with food, but the subject mice would receive a small electric shock.

And now, during Phase 3, I'm going to remove the partner mice and replace them with future versions of the subjects, sent back in time. I plan to observe the behavior of these new subject mice, the "Second Fates," when they see their past selves receiving the shocks that they remember receiving.

[[SFX: Timepiece spooling up; handling rat in cage]]

ME: Okay girls, here we go...

[[SFX: Timepiece activates; radio tuning]]

ME: Maggie Elbourne, Timepiece experiment #3, February 1, 1950. I'm beginning Phase 2 today. I'm about to introduce the partner mice into their cages... The shock mechanism has been tested, and I... I don't like it but–

Oh. There's... There are already mice in these cages. This is I suppose, Phase 3.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

ME: Phase 3 results. Subject Clotho spent this week as she spent her first week: pressing the button and receiving food, thereby shocking the younger Clotho. She seemed very indifferent to the pain of her past self, but whether this was inherent to Clotho's personality or was induced from the time displacement is hard to tell.

Subject Lachesis definitely recognized her past self. She actually refused to press her button, despite starving herself. There were moments when she would look outside the cage, as though... As though she were pleading for help. However, she has successfully changed her own experience: the younger Lachesis has now never received any shocks. I wonder if, when I send them back this time, she will still know not to press the button. She may well have saved herself.

But Subject Atropos... True to her name. I believe she also was able to recognize the button's effect on her past self. Rather than stop pressing her button, however... Atropos began to press her button rapidly, ignoring the food she received in favor of pressing it over, and over, and over. I had to disconnect the cage's button mechanism. She would have... But I need to keep the integrity of the experiment, so I couldn't let it get that far. Suffice it to say, I think Atropos will continue to remember the button's effects. I know I will.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

SG: Thanks for seeing me on such short notice.

DR.F: Of course, Sally. Is everything alright?

SG: Yeah, I've just been... It's hard to sleep.

DR.F: How long have you been having trouble sleeping?

SG: The past week. Um, two weeks…. Month... The entire time I've been seeing you... Since Sharma.

DR.F: Why haven't you said anything about this before? You were forthcoming about your agoraphobia!

SG: I thought I could handle it on my own. I'm no stranger to sleepless nights. But in seven days I have gotten nine hours of sleep, and I can't keep going like this.

DR.F: Do you know what's keeping you awake?

SG: What do you think? Has anyone ever died in front of you before?

DR.F: No, and certainly not in such a violent manner as Mr. Sharma–

SG: Dr. Sharma. I watched as he was brutally gunned down in cold blood by one of my dearest friends. I felt the last gasps of life choke out of him.

DR.F: That must deeply distressing. What happens when you try to sleep?

SG: I don't know, what do you think happens? I don't sleep. I just... Can you give me like some Ambien or something? Wait, I don't think you don't have Ambien. Heh, do you have quaaludes? Are quaaludes a thing? Can I hit you up for some 'ludes?

DR.F: I don't prescribe medication, Sally. I try to help you understand for yourself why you have trouble sleeping. Maybe give you some techniques to try.

SG: No but I don't wanna make myself sleep, I need something to hit me over the head so I don't have a choice in the matter. Like, do you have NyQuil? I could do NyQuil.

DR.F: How much sleeping medication do they have in your time?

SG: There's a lot. If you was from where I was from, you'd wanna be asleep too.

DR.F: Are you saying that you don't "want" to sleep despite knowing that you have to?

SG: I mean, I an to sleep. I don't know. But the idea of being asleep... I just don't want to go away again.

DR.F: What do you mean by "going away?"

SG: I know it's dumb, but since I woke up from my coma I feel like I'm going to miss things.

DR.F: That isn't dumb. It's perfectly normal to fear that a traumatic event will recur.

SG: When I was gone, I missed so much. Every time I close my eyes I wonder if I'll wake up again.

DR.F: I understand that anxiety. A recurring theme of our sessions is a feeling that you've been wronged by time itself. Sleep must feel like you're being robbed.

SG: Okay, it's crazy, I'm crazy, I know, but... I'm constantly afraid of what will pass me by.

DR.F: Again, Sally, while your existence is certainly atypical, your hopes and fears are shared by many other people. You're not crazy.

[[SFX: radio tuning; static distortion; mouse in cage]]

ME: This is Maggie Elbourne. It's been 4 months since I began this rather appalling course of study. In that time I have littered my workspace with

mice driven dead or mad by what I've done to them. I have now repeatedly requested that Dr. Carling hand the project over to another researcher. He has refused me, each time.

And he knows. He knows I'll do whatever he hands me, because I can't afford to lose my position here. Because if I refuse to do what he tells me he'll blacklist me, and I'll never work in a laboratory ever again.

So. Now that you know why I can't stop these abominable experiments. We move on to number 4. Today we... Jesus, I hesitate to even give them names I just…

Today I have two subjects: The Mother and... and the Child.

The plan is to let the mother raise the child in isolation until the child is mature, about one month. Then I'll send the child back, so that the mature Child will exist while the immature Child is reared. Based on Atropos' reaction to her past self, I hope that when the two Children are housed in the same cage together, that the older do everything in its power to protect the younger. I hope.

I plan to send the mature Child mouse to March 3, 1950 at precisely 11am. Three, two, one, mark.

The Child has not appeared, which makes this Iteration 1.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

ME: Three, two, one, mark. And... There he is. He seems calm enough for the moment... What...

[[SFX: static distortion; mice in distress]]

ME: No no no, don't!

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

SG: I just can't believe he... he didn't tell me!

DR.F: That Whickman didn't tell you why he killed Dr. Sharma?

SG: He came in with his... goons and look, I know he was kind of a traitor or something and I know that he's got like, other spymaster things to do or whatever but I'm not other people! It's me, Sally! Everyone-loves-her-cause-she-loves-science-and-talks-weird Sally! I shouldn't be out of the loop like this. I just... I thought I had control in my life. For about 45 seconds I had done a Thing and it was a Success and then Nikhil Sharma had to fall out of the future and bring a mountain of questions with him. Questions that'll never get answered. Questions that'll bother me forever.

DR.F: Questions don't always matter, Sally. Real life is not a radio serial. Things aren't always tied up in neat little bows! I understand that you've been through a lot these past few months, but this kind of obsession is unhealthy. And I think you know that.

SG: You don't know the half of what I'm talking about! I dedicated my life to knowledge, to the Timepiece. You couldn't begin to understand the cosmically inscrutable bullshit that I have to live with every goddamn day!

DR.F: You on' live with it, Sally! You're not a part of it anymore. I don't know how forgiving Mr. Whickman is, but it seems like you seriously breached his trust. Have you thought about the stress he might be feeling? If your friends are who they say they are, then they're having to make immensely stressful choices with no right answer on a day-to-day basis, and you're running around saying it's unfair that you're not part of the club anymore!

SG: I know it must be hard, but they need me. I know as much. And I need them. But this gotdamn year-and-a-half of distance keeps holding me back. Doesn't matter with Partridge. Hell, he'll always be a voicemail away. But it was because of some damn accident that I still don't know anything about. Who knows? Maybe it was my fault! Maybe I delved too greedy, too deep and I paid the price! Honestly, that kind of does sound like me.

DR.F: Do you not see a pattern? I don't necessarily think you had anything to do with what happened to you, but your compulsion to know has taken you down dark roads. I know the kind of person you are, Sally, so I know this must be difficult to hear, but it might be time for you to move onto something simpler. Have you tried gardening?

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

ME: To whomever it may concern, this is Maggie Elbourne. Former research assistant to Dr. Aldous Carling. Under his coercion, and commissioned by the US Office of Developed Anomalous Resources, I recently performed a series of experiments concerning time travel and its effect on the behavior of several mice. The effects ranged from minimal to severe to... Extreme. Very few of the test subjects survived.

Throughout the process I became increasingly uncomfortable with the amount of violence the experiments seem to incur. Unsatisfied with the results of these experiments, and utterly refusing to heed the advice of the very researcher andpicke for the assignment, Dr. Aldous Carling–that's C-A-R-L-I-N-G–threatened my career and my livelihood in the scientific community if I did not continue to obey orders. And so I continued, until I was witness to some... Truly horrifying... I'm going to make myself sick to even remember it. Confusion. Violent behavior. Suicide. So much blood...

And then Dr. Carling brought me one last experiment. Up until that point I'd at least been given the freedom to design my own experiments. To try to minimize any harm! But this one... They wanted me to take 12 mice and create time-duplicates. A massive amount of them. Copies upon copies, all

living together in a massive colony. They included a colony design in the materials, and it... It was a prison. A prison for mice to reverberate off of their duplicate selves, until they no doubt tore themselves apart. No colony designed in such a way could ever be sustainable.

It was too much. I... I ran. I could not in good conscience stand by and allow such havok. And that was just on the mice! Can you imagine if they'd actually let people operate this thing?

[[SFX: ???]]

ME: I left behind my notes, but I managed to sneak out Pandora. Say hello, Pandora.

[[SFX: mouse in cage]]

ME: I hope that when whoever finds this, they'll have believed me. Have… [cough cough]

[[SFX: static distortion]]

ME: Hope they'll believe me. As for what lays ahead of me... I don't care. As long as I can leave that callous world behind me.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

DR.F: *(on tape)* Have you tried gardening?

SG: *(on tape)* [sigh] You might be right. Maybe I have been going too hard on myself. Maybe Sharma was a sign that I'm not cut out for this work. I think... I think I'm going to try to have a life. Outside ODAR. Outside this nonsense.

[[SFX: tape stops]]

HC: Glad you finally started reading my playbook, Esther. Did you take notes on the chapter marked "disrespecting doctor-patient confidentiality?"

ER: I'm not even going to dignify that with a response, Hank.

HC: [laughs] So what's the word from the shrink's mouth?

ER: She's not stable. Everything she's been through is having a profound effect on the way she interacts with people. But whether or not we can attribute it to the effects of paradox exposure—

HC: —Or whether she's just an irresponsible sociopath.

ER: —We don't know why she's unstable.

HC: Isn't that why you commissioned that study? What's her name, Elbourne? Where does that one go: animal trials or human ones?

ER: I'm keeping an eye on her as well. Aside from Dr. Elbourne's... "outburst," she's not significantly worse for wear. It seems delegating exposure to the logical Gordian knots goes pretty far in diminishing the symptoms.

HC: She seemed like a bleeding heart to me, I'm not even sure quitting the project was so out of character for the Rat Queen.

ER: They were mice. And you can't handle one loose end?

HC: Don't start, Roberts. I wouldn't be running around giving classified information to such unstable elements were it my call. Stop making Sally Grissoms. You and Whickman keep letting your personal life make the big decisions.

ER: Do we really need to have this discussion again?

HC: What will it take to convince you she's a liability? She's put our operation in jeopardy before. And then she brought a wolf into the henhouse. They said Sharma told her they were going to "democratize" time travel! She had no idea what he was really trying to do.

ER: I understand. You think I can't see it Hank, but I do. We need her, she's still the best expert on anchor field physics we'll ever see, but she's too unstable to be of use to us like this.

HC: So?

ER: So... look at my results from the Elbourne study. Distancing herself can help stabilize Sally. Give her some time to get her mind right. Let her start a farm or something, and retire. Let her find the most fulfilling life she can without us. And eventually... Boredom and curiosity will drive her back. Ready and willing.

HC: ...That's a little dark for you.

ER: Maybe. Maybe not.

[[SFX: tape recorder stops]]

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ars PARADOXICA is created by Daniel Manning and Mischa Stanton.
Episode 15: Butterfly features –

Kristen DiMercurio (Sally Grissom)
Katie Speed (Esther Roberts)
Dan Anderson (Hank Cornish)
Lauren Shippen (Maggie Elbourne)

Richard Penner (Dr. Fitzgerald)
with special thanks to Isabel Atkinson

Production help from Danielle Shemaiah and Andy Goddard. Original music by Mischa Stanton and by Eno Freedman-Brodmann.
ars PARADOXICA is brought to you by The Internet: A universe inside the universe.

23 25 17 21 | 14 12 24 20 16 | 20 04 16 | 21 16 20 | 04 | 10 21 26 06 | 08 23 18 01 04 23 | 06 18 | 16 09 08 | 01 01 24
WEATHER: windy

16: Greenhouse

WRITTEN BY DANIELLE SHEMAIAH
DIRECTED & SOUND DESIGN BY MISCHA STANTON

[[SFX: a breeze; wind chimes in the distance; Sally is digging in her garden; she wipes her brow; sighs happily; and resumes digging; radio tuning]]

ESTHER ROBERTS (ER): " – Reports show that the Office of Developed Anomalous Resources has suffered from a number of hitherto unforeseen personnel changes that have resulted in a considerable decline in productivity. With few prospective candidates to fill the current vacancies, it would be wise, in my humble opinion, to reconsider the distribution of military resources if output does not improve in the next quarter. We would do well to heed the warnings the abrupt exits of Jack Wyatt, Sally Grissom, and the extra-jurisdictional asset Margaret Elbourne, lest we find ourselves captaining a sinking ship–"

CHET WHICKMAN (CW): I've heard enough. I thought you said your last meeting went well?

ER: I thought it did. "Unforeseen?" that lousy–

CW: Esther, what happened here?

ER: He's a two-faced jackal, that's what happened–

[[SFX: Chet knocks on table]]

CW: You should know by know that the walls have ears.

ER: Let them listen! Hank Cornish is throwing his weight around. Reminding us that he's after his own interests. He always has been, and [mocking the earlier quote] we would do well to look after ours. And frankly, if you want my opinion? We'd do well to remember that when we're making him privy to every need-to-know item on the docket.

[[SFX: radio tuning; Sally in her workshop; radio drama plays in the background; a cricket is loose.]]

SALLY GRISSOM (SG): Oh shit, how did you get in here?

[[SFX: Sally swats at the cricket; she knocks something over.]]

SG: Archie, you are no help at all.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

CW: So, what part of your conversation with Hank-

ER: No one conversation led to Hank Cornish getting on a plane to Washington and recommending that “in his humble opinion” we should be gutted for parts.

CW: I really didn’t ask him to be around, Esther. He kind of came with the job.

ER: But you’re in the job now, so take some goddamn control! Can you pretend, for one moment, that you have as much invested in this as I do?

CW: I am every bit as much invested, Esther. And I am intimately aware how much of this falls to me. But you’ve insisted on fixing the problem yourself, so what are you suggesting we do?

ER: You know what I need. We’re stalling out, and–

CW: Sally Grissom is still out of the question. On your own repeated recommendation, in fact. So what else have you got?

ER: I don’t know, yet.

[[SFX: radio tuning; Sally picks up the phone and dials; a data-sound and then a beep.]]

SG: Hey, Anthony. So it turns out the simple life can give you a strange kind of…hope? About the world? Those sound like famous last words. Maybe I’m overdoing it on the Vitamin D. Anyway, I think i’ve finally settled into a rhythm that I can live with. It turns out I’m actually kind of a maverick at this gardening thing. Well, I would be. Right now I’m battling bad sun and arid Coloradan soil. But I think I’m winning.

[[SFX: techno-greenhouse whirring]]

Not to brag, but I’m developing kind of a–biodome, you could call it? There was a movie? Never mind. I should have just grown a little cactus and taken up stamp collecting or something, but I wanted a challenge. Anyway, the idea is to build a space where I can manipulate hyperlocal weather conditions using solar power and… okay, it’s a greenhouse. You know what that is. But long-term–and this is the coolest part–I feel like if I strike the right symbiotic relationship between the plant life and like, if I can figure out how to fabricate photovoltaic cells, I could take myself completely off the grid. Dream big, right? ...Yeah.

Also, remember that one time when I talked about developing my own fertilizer? Well, I’m doing that too. All it really took was some light reading and more than a few trips to the florist to nag him with vague questions about ideal breeding conditions and plant behavior and obscure Coloradan… Colo… Coloradoan? Weather data for Colorado, that kind of stuff. But the most infuriating part is the waiting. Looking through a physical catalogue and ordering seeds and then waiting for months while they're shipped to you via snail mail. I guess there's something to be said for developing a sense of

...patience, but Jesus, where are the Amazon Prime Drones when you need them? So all that said, I've got pears and parsley and petunias and tulips and, yeah, a cactus growing outside and I should have some dragonfruit seeds to test out in about… six months. Ugh.

Today? Test one of "Dr. Grissom's Miracle Elixir." I promise I'll come up with a better name for that–I'll start on it as soon as I've tested this new batch against the control–at least now the chemical composition is past the place where it slowly ate away at the pottery. With any luck, Bellis Perennis specimen one should grow from seedling to full maturity in… approximately 3-5 days. So I guess I'll check back in with you around then. Talk to you soon.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

CW: An explosive disguised as a cigarette?

ER: Effective, but not entirely practical.

CW: It seems simple enough.

ER: Might be that it's too simple, actually. It seems like there's an impulse to light them–

CW: Esther, what are we doing here?

ER: We're taking CIA reports about field gadgets and using the Blackroom to generate data on practical results. Sourcing out field tests to the rest of time. It's remarkably effective.

CW: Seems like a remarkable waste of resources to me.

ER: I solved the problem, the way I always do. It's a Band-Aid, but it's the best we can do in a pinch, at least until the compound interest kicks in.

CW: But we're better than this. Esther, come on, you know we're better than… this.

ER: Not really, Chet. Not since–

CW: Don't say it. Don't say her name.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

SG: So I keep my hands busy. I garden. But when I need to keep my mind busy? Planting flowers is a fun hobby, Partridge, but it doesn't scratch the itch. So I've gone back to building things. There was this nitrogen still, the timed sprinkler. Then I started on this quixotic biodome project–but that won't get off the ground until I can figure out how to build halfway efficient solar panels, so it's still mostly in the "glass box in my backyard" stage.

Anyway, I started rooting around for spare parts in the closet and… I found the bag with all of the stuff that came with me from 20XX. They locked away all of my stuff, but I snached it back when we were moving to Point-of-Exile, because, I mean, at that point ODAR was basically six people and a van. There's the lab coat, still stained after my lunch Rorschached all over the deck of the Eldridge, my pens, in all their sweet, sweet, gel-inked glory, a business card, and a receipt for pizza I honestly do not remember consuming.

And I found my cell phone.

[[SFX: Esther knocks on Sally's door.]]

SG: Gotta go, bye.

[[SFX: harriedly hangs up her handset; another knock; she makes her way over to the door and opens it.]]

SG: Roberts.

ER: Sally.

SG: Hi.

ER: Hi. These are for you.

[[SFX: paper bag rustling.]]

SG: Uh, thanks? I thought you'd given up on stocking my pantry.

ER: It's a small town. I haven't seen you around, so I thought…am I interrupting? I heard you talking–

SG: To my diary.

ER: Your diary.

SG: Yeah. Well... come in.

ER: You have been busy, Sally. Are those…

SG: Pumpkins. Tiny for now, but come October? It's the Great Pumpkin, Charlie Brown, you'll see–

ER: Charlie Brown the jazz singer?

SG: What? No, he's the little… with the dog? The kid! Forget it.

ER: Wow, Sally, this is… impressive. How much of this is–

SG: –I'm not sure.

[[Sally and Esther talk over each other.]]

SG: Hey, listen, I'm sorry if/oh/Sorry I was just/um/maybe if

ER: Sally, I just came to say that/oh/no, you first/well I/

[[They laugh]]

SG: Go ahead.

ER: Thank you. Look. I just stopped by to say that… I'm sorry about the way things have happened. I know this isn't exactly what any of us predicted–

SG: Irony of ironies–

ER: I'm serious, Sally. I'm trying to apologize here.

SG: It's not your fault, Roberts. Is it?

ER: Probably. Partially.

SG: Well, that's good to know, I guess.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

SG: We used to be a lot better at this.

ER: There used to be four of us. We used to be a team. We used to be a lot of things.

SG: What are we now?

ER: Friends, at least… I was hoping.

SG: Difficult to be friends with people you can't trust.

ER: That would be a very astute observation.

SG: ODAR killed my friend. Whickman did it himself.

ER: I know.

SG: And you still work for him.

ER: I know. Look, I've already lost Jack. Just because there's a whole slew of confidential things that I'm not at liberty to share with you anymore doesn't mean I'm interested in losing the only other–the only other person who I don't have to walk on pins and needles around.

SG: Does Whickman know you're here?

ER: No, Sally.

SG: It’s a valid question.

ER: I guess I deserve that.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

ER: So what has Doctor Sally Grissom been getting up to?

SG: I've gotten into radio serials, and, despite what it might look like, the plants make pretty good company. It’s my own little “Victory Garden”–though that might be a bit of a stretch. It is nice to do something with my hands, but I’m not sure I appreciate what everyone thinks it stands for–more than one person has asked me “when will my husband return from the war?” And there's this stray tomcat that comes around every so often–I've never been too good with animals, but he warmed right up to me - I'm starting to think there's catnip somewhere in this garden. He's a total… lap cat? or at least he's a bit of an attention hog. I don't know if he belongs to anyone, but I've been calling him Archimedes. Archie, for short. I’ve gone full Pleasantville... Anyway, the garden.

ER: The garden.

SG: It’s… peaceful. For the first time in a long time, I feel like I’ve got something I can call my own. I’ve got control over what happens in my life. Somewhere I can rest and… well, I'm developing this technology–

[[SFX: radio tuning; cards are being played]]

ER: *(laughing)* Honestly, I don’t think the poor kid believed us when we hired him. Suddenly he’s afraid of every blinking light and closing door in the entire facility. He’s sweet, he’s just… not the brightest bulb in the batch.

SG: How are you…doing this?

[[SFX: meow, knocks cards off table]]

SG: Damn it Archie!

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

SG: Having Roberts around has been…nice. But I’ve got science on the brain now and tinkering with dirt and fake rain just isn’t cutting it anymore.

DR. FITZGERALD (DR.F): Hm. What is cutting it?

SG: I’ve decided to restore power to my phone. I don’t even know if it still works. Hopefully, all I need is the right power supply. I’ve started a teardown on it. I built my own special screwdrivers too. The battery is… I think the technical term is borked, but the board itself seems fine. Maybe a little

dusty. I cracked the screen the day I went back in time, actually. Not on the Eldridge–you'd think that–but I was getting coffee and it slipped out of my hand.

DR.F: [laugh] A portable phone? That seems like a worthwhile hobby. You've said before that the phone is precious to you.

SG: The problem is, I really only get one shot at this. I mess up, it's toast. I mean, this thing couldn't even take being outside on concrete in the summer for a few short minutes...and I can't exactly build a motherboard here, but I'll need to replicate battery power somehow…

[[SFX: radio tuning; cards]]

ER: You're getting the hang of this…but you're going to have to think faster if you want to win.

SG: Um… Sevens!

ER: Damn! Halfway to El Dorado. Come on, let's see them.

SG: Read 'em and weep, Roberts.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

SG: And I've got my projects, of course. You can take the Grissom out of the science lab but, you can't take the science lab–the science, out of the… you know what I mean.

ER: You could have your lab back if you wanted it, you know.

SG: No. We've been through this—

ER: I just had to do my due diligence… is it me?

SG: No, Esther, it's not you. It's…

ER: It's everything I throw myself into, how far I go for it. So it kind of is me. Because it's all my decision.

SG: ...Well, yeah, I guess so. But it's not you alone, I promise. Other than the ODAR stuff. I really like seeing you. And I'd love to have you back beside me in a lab, just… not an ODAR lab. So as long as that's the way things are, I'm gonna have to pass for the time being.

ER: An ex recently told me the same thing.

SG: Ouch, really? When?

ER: When we were in New York we met for drinks, and one thing led to another… But when it was done she told me that's why we didn't stay

together. I've been thinking about it a lot, and I'm not ashamed of wanting things for myself. And if that means I'm losing friends… Well, that's sad. It's unfortunate. I hope… I hope we can stay in touch like this.

SG: She, huh?

ER: …What?

SG: You just said she.

ER: No– no I didn't!

SG: You did.

ER: I said he, I–

SG: That explains… a lot of things.

ER: You can't tell anyone, Sally. Please, PLEASE don't tell anyone.

SG: Relax! You don't have to worry about that with me. I'm asexual, I get it.

ER: You're a what?

SG: Okay. You know how most ladies you meet are really into men? But you, obviously, are into women. I'm not really into anyone.

ER: ...Really? So, sex–

SG: It's never really done it for me. Like, it's nice, or whatever, but… I've got bigger stuff to think about, y'know? But that means I'm an outlier. Outside of the traditional system. So I get what it's like. And it also means I don't care who you wanna get it on with. Get-Groovy with? What is the saying in this time period? Make the beast with two backs? Making… whoopie?

ER: Please stop. Good Lord.

SG: [laugh] Fine, I'll stop. But deal.

ER: Deal.

[[SFX: cards]]

ER: …The answer's "Backseat Bingo", by the way.

SG: Wow.

[[SFX: radio tuning; cards]]

SG: That's five to my four. One more for the road?

ER: I've got to get going. I'm…happy for you, Sally. I-... What's that?

SG: What, the radio?

[[SFX: radio off]]

ER: No, the black slab on your desk. Is that some sort of a… recorder? It looks like… I don't know what it looks like, really. Something out of a Huxley novel.

SG: My phone.

ER: Phone!?

SG: Yeah, you–well, if it worked, you'd press this button here, and there'd be a... I suppose a television screen? pops up and the numbers would be there about…

ER: How would you dial them if they're–never mind, it doesn't matter. Did you get this from Sharma?

SG: I brought it back with me. Can I… have it back now?

ER: Oh, sure. It's just… I'm sorry. I didn't mean to-

SG: It's fine, Roberts.

ER: Do you want to… talk about it?

SG: I thought you had to leave.

ER: I mean, I should get going but… one more game?

SG: Sure.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

ER: Amelia said you wanted to speak with me?

CW: You took her on a business trip, told her all our secrets. And now, after informing all of us that the best professional course of action was to let her live her life without us–a direct quote from you–you're making house calls? Esther, what the hell do you think you're doing?

ER: Give it a rest, Chet. She already knows all of our secrets. She's half of them in the first place.

CW: I can't believe I'm having this discussion with you at all.

ER: Why? because Hank Cornish isn't here to back up your ridiculous, paranoid military logic?

CW: This is not a bickering match. I don't intend to engage you in spirited debate about every single one of my decisions. I am not Jack Wyatt. Sally Grissom elected to leave ODAR. When I told you I understood and that I sympathized with her–about not belonging here, and about not being able to get back, about whatever the hell it is that happened to her while no one was watching–I meant that. I just didn't think we'd spend another two years babysitting her.

ER: She spent one of those in a coma!

CW: I am so tired of nothing being her fault! The Timepiece is property of the United States government–

ER: She invented it!

CW: And Uncle Sam paid for it. And then, she brought a foreigner, an unknown agent into this facility on false authority, chased by open gunfire from enemy combatants. I'm not the one who didn't think this through.

ER: Chet, the least you could do–

CW: She betrayed our trust! Repeatedly! I thought she was an ally to our cause, but she set us back years for petty, selfish reasons. She trusted a man she knew barely a few over us, Esther. And she knows us better than anyone! I want to make the right choices and… if she had just come to me I might have listened, I might have...

ER: Sally has something we could use. It's…a phone. But it's more than that. Sally says it's a compact voice recorder, a camera, an… automatic wireless transmission arbitrator–digital wireless telegraphy. Instantaneous telecommunication. From unit to unit, from anywhere in the world, using artificial satellites. It's a science fictional dream. Do you have any idea what we could accomplish with technology like this? It could save us.

CW: If it worked. And it doesn't. I've seen it before.

ER: She'll get it working. You know she will. She's determined and she's got nothing but time…

CW: And what if, given the circumstances, Sally isn't too keen on handing over this "revolutionary technology?"

ER: Then we'll find a way.

CW: This doesn't change the way I feel about your involvement.

ER: Are you suggesting that I'm incapable of this?

CW: I am saying that you've always had a soft spot for her. Thought her a friend. Saw fit to lie to your commanding officers for her when there was a choice to be made.

ER: That was before.

CW: I am informing you that despite how capable you may be of carrying out any task that we set forth here, I am uncomfortable with the idea of you getting involved personally. No self-respecting commander allows his men to walk face-first into a mission that would expose their vulnerabilities. If you can't be trusted to know what yours are then you should be thankful that I do.

ER: You're being unreasonable.

CW: That's final, Esther. Cut it out. This is a matter of security.

ER: No Chet, this is not a matter of security. This is a matter of survival. And surviving is something we will not do if she doesn't. Not as an organization, and not individually. If you've got a better idea, I'm willing to hear it. Otherwise, this is well within the jurisdiction of the department you put me in charge of. I don't need your permission. I need you to not stand in my way.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

SG: Diary of Sally Grissom. August 8th, 1950. It's the truth. I am charging my phone with my car battery, and crossing my fingers that I don't fry the car or the only smartphone in all existence. I really wanted to build a potato battery, but I did the math and I'd need enough potatoes to get through a Martian winter, so that's out.

You wouldn't believe the work I had to do to get the USB connector to… [sigh] I missed this thing. I forgot the weight in my hand, the light of the screen. An extension of my body. At last, my right arm is complete again.

Part of me feels like I should have gone with Sharma when I had the chance. I was indecisive and it cost him his life–and now part of me that feels like I've lost mine too. I'm stuck here. I threw away my shot.

The whole reason I wanted to stay is because I didn't want to feel so goddamn alone and... now look where I am. Surrounded by fucking exotic vegetables and a half-working cell phone and a great hobby and a perfectly generic, General Mills-life. In a town with friendly people and "Good Mornings" and breakfast and coffee that takes fifteen minutes to percolate on the stove and I have never felt more bored in my entire life.

"Live the pastoral dream" I told myself. "Forget about time travel," I insisted. Thanks a ton, past me. That's working out real well.

I have this neighbor who brings me breakfast sometimes. She doesn't ask any questions. We share a fence. I can see her kitchen through the window in mine. She just sticks her head out the back door sometimes and asks me if I'm hungry, like a stray animal.

There's an old man who sits at the bus stop on my corner. Every day at the same time. He straightens his tie, reads a newspaper. If I pass by, he takes his hat off, puts it down. Reads me the jokes out of the comic strips like they're the funniest things in the world. He's… sweet. He laughs too hard, and the jokes are stupid. But he's sweet.

He always looks at me to see if I'm laughing, too. And I think about it a lot, what the equivalent of this would be if I were back in my time– and then I remember that I'm never going to find out.

[[SFX: phone turns on]]

Oh my god. It's on. The last real remnant of 20[redacted], the only proof of the world I came from. It's right where I left it! Cluttered home screen, texts from people I already hadn't talked to in a decade BEFORE I went back. Oh, look at these photos! There was that party at Beth's place, the Halloween costume Jamie was working on, I can't… believe that all of this is here. [gasp] My voicemails. My literal, actual voicemails…

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

VM1: Hey, Doctor Grissom. It's Kayla. Um, Rogers. One of the fellows? You told me to call if I ever–anyway, I wanted to let you know that I hit traffic on 35. GPS says there's a collision, Puts my ETA at around 21 minutes, so I'll be in the office a little late. Oh! And, um, I know you don't usually come to these things, but Jamie and I and a couple of the others are going out for drinks on Friday. You should come, if you want. Hang out. I have to go. See you soon!

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

VM2: Hey there, Brainiac! I don't know why I expected you to pick up your phone. Listen, I'm in town! Headed back south. Shoot me a message. We can catch up. I miss your face. You can tell me what's got your head in the sand these days.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

VM3: Good afternoon, SALLY GRISSOM. We're calling about your subscription to Popular Mechanics. We are calling to ask whether you have been enjoying your digital subscription–

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

A CROWD: HAPPY BIRTHDAY SALLY!

SALLY'S MOM: Hey sweetie, it's your mother. I know we don't always talk as often as we'd like to, but–Sally, I want you to know that I love you, and that I think there's greatness in your future. I am so proud of you, sweetheart. Give me a call when you get a chance. We miss you.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

SG: Diary of Sally Grissom. Same day as before. I got what I wanted, but I–I'm getting rid of the phone. I definitely don't want it, and Roberts is never gonna stop asking for it because holy fuck is that a useful thing for ODAR to have.

[[SFX: Sally smashes the phone]]

It's done. Now nobody gets it. It's part of the past. Or it would be, if it wasn't literally a part of the future. Part of my past. And I'm putting it behind me. And I know just what I'm going to plant over it: Chinese Chrysanthemums. Seeds just came in today. It's gonna be great. It's going to be great.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

CW: So did you get the device?

ER: I sent my people out to turn over her house while she was out. No dice.

CW: Get an agent to take it from her house while she's in a coma. Now that we know where it is. Put it back before she ever goes looking.

[[SFX: intercom sound]]

ER: Yes?

AMELIA: Miss Roberts, you're needed in the atrium. The children are here.

CW: … Children?

ER: Beats me.

[[SFX: buzzer]]

ER: I'll be right there.

[[SFX: tape recorder stops]]

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ars PARADOXICA was created by Daniel Manning and Mischa Stanton. Episode 16: Greenhouse features –

Kristen DiMercurio (Sally Grissom)
Reyn Beeler (Chet Whickman)
Katie Speed (Esther Roberts)
Richard Penner (Dr. Fitzgerald)

Fionna Thraille, Heather Auden, Thea Rodgers, Austin Beach (additional voices)
Jean DiMercurio (Sally's mom)
with special thanks to Isabel Atkinson

Original music by Mischa Stanton and Eno Freedman-Brodmann.
ars PARADOXICA is brought to you by the Internet: Shipping every character with EVERY character.

23 15 19 09 11 18 26 02 02 24 | 21 17 | 19 | 22 22 06 21 01 23
WEATHER: stormy

17: Plasticity

WRITTEN BY ELI BARRAZA
DIRECTED & SOUND DESIGN BY MISCHA STANTON

[[SFX: tape recorder starts]]

TEACHER: Could anyone like to share what their favorite movie will be in 1985?

LIAM (L): Labyrinth!

TEACHER: That is a good movie, but can someone tell me why that answer is incorrect? Ah yes, Jonah?

JONAH (J): Labyrinth came out in 1986.

TEACHER: Sharp! What would a more appropriate answer be?

J: Well my favorite is the Goonies, for sure but since we're landing a bit before that came out in June, I'd have to be careful and say something like the Black Cauldron.

L: That one's awful!

J: No, it's not!

L: You're just trying to defend the fact you cried when Gurgi died.

TEACHER: Please, let's not argue in front of our guests.

AGENT GIBSON (AG): Oh, not a problem, I understand the passions of youth. Thank you for allowing us to sit in on one of your lessons.

TEACHER: Class, can we thank Agent Gibson for visiting with us today?

CLASS: Thank you.

AG: It's been a pleasure. Van?

VAN (V): Yes sir, I'll escort you out.

[[SFX: Van and Agent Gibson exit the classroom]]

AG: So that's them, huh?

V: That's our oldest age group, actually. We separate them into three tiers during lessons to ensure the education level is appropriate for their developmental stage.

AG: I recall the lesson plans that came across my desk. Quite the undertaking, were you there when any of them were acquired?

V: No, they thought it best for me not to be present during extraction so I wasn't linked to the possible trauma.

AG: It's my understanding it was supposed to be quite painless as they were taken before their deaths.

V: Oh, I was speaking more to the emotional trauma. Most of these kids came from foster homes, and some of them were not pleased to be selected for a "special program."

AG: Oh, I see... This is why I prefer staying behind the desk. At least your arrival will be easier, everything already prepared for you.

V: The Blackroom has been alerted?

AG: Not yet. We'll send the instructions when everything is finalized.

V: Understood.

AG: Thank you for allowing me to drop in on the lessons, but if you'll excuse me, I've got to get to my next meeting.

V: Not a problem sir. Thank you for stopping by.

AG: Before I leave, what is your favorite movie?

V: Sir?

AG: From 1985 I mean. You're going with them so you should have an answer as well, no?

V: [laughs] Oh I see. Let's just say, it's the reason I signed on for this project.

AG: Hmm. Very well. Good luck in your preparations, Agent Van.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

CARMEN (C): Petra.... Petra.... Petra!

PETRA (P): Stop poking me Carmen!

C: Are you scared about tomorrow?

P: I'm sleepy.

C: I can't sleep.

P: Why?

C: I don't wanna go to the new place.

P: I'll hold your hand.

[[SFX: Carmen attempts to hold Petra's hand]]

P: Not right now!

C: When?

P: When they push the buttons.

C: Kay. Can you sing the song one more time?

P: Okay. Arrorró mi niño/arrorró mi sol/arrorró pedazo/de mi corazón.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

V: Children, is everyone alright? Liam, please stop pretending you're vomiting, you'll make someone actually do it.

[[SFX: Jonah vomits]]

V: And there goes Jonah, perfect. Carmen, you can open your eyes, we're here now.

[[SFX: door opens]]

V: Ah, there they are. Hello, I believe you're expecting us? You must be Ms. Roberts.

ESTHER ROBERTS (ER): Yes, and it is my pleasure to meet all of you. We've got rooms prepared for you if you'd like to rest a bit before we run the tests

V: We woke up only a few hours ago, our time. I promised them we'd go shopping in town after being poked and prodded so I have a feeling they'd like to get that over with.

ER: Of course. *(to the children)* My team is very excited to meet you all!

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

V: Audio journal of Van ████. The date is May 19th, 1985. We left at 0900 December 13th, 1990, landed this morning at 0700 local time.

The kids were nervous at first, but they relaxed after the tests. They've seen so many doctors already, what's a few more, right? None of them like the MRIs but I can't blame them. I'm not a big fan either but if I'm going to be traveling with them across the century I've got to stay healthy.

At least they loved the yankee swap idea! Whenever we land in a new... time… Huh. I should probably come up with a name for it. Make it a proper holiday like New Years, or 4th of July, or Arbor Day. Anyway getting the gifts in town and then exchanging them, I think it helps with the initial cultural adjustment. And what kid doesn't like presents, right?

I did have to confiscate Liam's GameBoy. I told them nothing from 1990 and of course he didn't listen. It's hard to punish the kid though, I-

[[SFX: knock at door]]

V: Yes? Come in.

[[SFX: door opens]]

V: Hello Petra.

P: Hello Agent Van.

V: Please, you know you can just call me just Van right?

P: Okay.

V: ...Well? Did you want to talk to me, are you feeling alright?

P: I just wanted to give you this because you didn't get a present.

V: h there's no need for tha-okay. Thank you.

[[SFX: Van unwraps the gift]]

V: [laughs] This is perfect, thank you Petra. Now, if there's nothing else, you'd better get to your room. You really shouldn't be wandering the halls alone without a buddy.

P: Am I in trouble?

V: Not this time, no. Off you go.

P: Goodnight Agent... Goodnight Van.

[[SFX: Petra exits]]

V: God, I'm terrible at Rubik's Cubes, could never get them to-

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

1984 ANNOUNCER 1: –Los Angeles welcomes the athletes of the world for the Summer Olympics–

1984 ANNOUNCER 2: –you'll see why 1984 won't be like 1984.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

TEACHER: And why is it important to be precise in our speech and how we think about time?

L: To mitigate any potential effects of BS.

[[SFX: kids laugh]]

TEACHER: Hush now, thank you Liam. Right, we're still studying the effects of Butterfly Syndrome on the adolescent mind and thus it is imperative to ensure that thought processes–

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

1983 ANNOUNCER: –carried an American woman astronaut, Sally Ride, into space and into history–

1981 ANNOUNCER: –Washington Hilton hotel when shots were fired at President Reagan–

[[SFX: radio tuning; store muzak]]

P: his present is perfect, I can't wait to show it to my teacher. Thank you ma'am!

STORE OWNER (SO): f course, come back any time young lady!

[[SFX: Petra exits the store]]

SO: Excuse me little girl, can I help you find something?

C: I'm looking for a present!

S: Oh I see... Well I'm not sure we have what you're looking for here.

C: Oh I've been here before, you had different stuff last time but it was good stuff!

SO: No, I'm sure I would have remembered such a... precocious little girl as yourself. Why don't you run along now and find a more suitable–

V: Carmen, there you are! Petra's all done, have you–

SO: Sir? Is this your...

V: What? Oh yes, Carmen here is my student.

SO: Uh…

V: Uh, class field trip to learn the value of money.

S: Ah I see, well...

V: Is there a problem?

C: The lady was saying that I can't find my gift here!

V: Is that so?

S: Well yes, you see I was simply worried that... Being so... young she might not...

V: Carmen, I think this lady might be right. There's nothing here we'd like to buy. Petra is with the older students next door, I think we'll find some nicer things there. Good day, ma'am.

C: Bye!

[[SFX: Van and Carmen exit]]

C: Petra already got hers? Darn...

[[SFX: footsteps approach]]

NIKHIL SHARMA (NS): Ah, excuse me madame. I'd like to purchase these lemon drops.

[[SFX: drops candy on counter]]

SO: Oh for heaven's sake, just take them!

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

1979 ANNOUNCER: -new Prime Minister, the first woman in Europe's-

1977 ANNOUNCER: -Elvis' death this afternoon-

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

P: Come on, Liam!

C: I definitely heard someone coming that time...

P: top being such a scaredy cat.

C: I'm just being cautious! If we get caught-

L: –Which we won't!

C: Shut up! If we get caught we lose town privileges at the bare minimum. That means less time learning how to acclimate to new time periods! That could mean the difference between life and death!

P: I figure if we were gonna die out there, it would've been when we were 5 or 6 but we've got plenty of experience acclimating under our belt by now.

C: You realize we're probably only 10, right? None of us can even drive yet!

L: I can drive. They estimated my age around 16, 1st Tier's been taking lessons.

C: That's not the point! We shouldn't be going back to meet ourselves!

P: Name one legitimate reason why that's a bad idea.

C: I don't think I have to–

L: Callate, los dos!

C: I regret ever teaching you Spanish!

L: Seriously, shut up. There's someone standing at the end of the hallway.

C: What if it's one of the 77s?!

P: I don't think an agent would just stand there.

L: Aaaand now they're coming towards us. Shit!

C: Whatdowedowhatdowedo–

FUTURE LIAM (FL): Nothing, it's just me!

L: Holy–

P: It worked!

FL: Damn right it worked! What up me from 10 minutes ago?

L: Jesus christ on a pogo stick!

P: And there it is, the proof in the pudding! He's here because we sent him back!

C: This still doesn't feel right.

P: If we don't send him back now, you can explain to Van why we have two Liams.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

P: You ready?

L: Um, I think so?

FL: You'll be fine. And by going back 10 minutes, that means there'll be only one of us here, so they'll be none the wiser.

[[SFX: computer powers up]]

L: I'm starting to think the pint sized one was right about this.

C: Pint sized?

[[SFX: Petra sets the Timepiece]]

P: C'mon, Liam. You were the one who pointed out we always travel to years before we arrive somewhere so we never meet ourselves. We breaking boundaries here! Boldly going where no one has gone before!

C: Yeah, but remember that mouse study from Dr. Carling when the little mice met themselves–

P: Thank you for the history lesson, Carm! Bootin' this sucker up!

FL: Said hi to past us for us! Saying, uh say hi–

[[SFX: static distortion]]

C: Liam are you okay? Petra, turn off the machine I think he's bleeding!

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

V: Explain. Now.

C: It wasn't our fault! It was an accident! I told them it was a bad idea! I'm really really sorry–

P: Carmen, shut up!

C: [sobs]

V: Petra, you do not speak to a classmate that way!

P: But she... Ugh. I'm sorry.

V: [sigh] No, I'm sorry. I've grown lax with you kids. Sometimes I forget how... never mind. Petra, please wait outside. I'll speak to you after.

P: Yes sir.

[[SFX: Petra storms out]]

V: Now, putting apologies aside: What happened?

C: Liam, he kept talking about how you could meet yourself, using the timepiece and Petra thought that'd be cool so she said she knew how to break in where they keep the field kits.

V: And why on earth would you go along with this Carmen?

C: Because I thought it'd be okay! And how Petra always said I was a stick in the mud so I thought it'd be cool! But then I remembered about what happened to those mice when they met themselves. So I got second thoughts so I told them what might happen. But they said that I said that we couldn't be affected by breaks in causality because our neuroplasticity, and being raised in the opposite direction of everyone. But obviously I was wrong because I'm sitting here in front of you and Liam's in a hospital bed in a CAGE and I don't know what's going to happen to him, and even though we can use things like the TAP to tell us exactly what the world will be like when we get there, it's impossible to really know my own future let alone Liam's! [sobs]

V: Take a deep breath. No one knows where they're gone… [coughs]

[[SFX: Carmen goes abruptly silent]]

V: ...Going. Even us here at ODAR. You're right. We just don't know.

[[SFX: radio tuning; footsteps approach]]

NS: Hey kid, you okay?

P: What? Oh, yeah. I'm good.

NS: You don't look so good. Mind if I sit?

P: Go ahead.

[[SFX: Nikhil sits]]

NS: What's on your mind?

P: I don't think I'm supposed to talk about it.

NS: What, super secret mission didn't go so well?

P: Yeah, something like that.

NS: You're a part of that class, right? Well of course you are, there's only one class of ODAR kids I know about... Wowza, I am not great at talking to the youths, am I? [laughs; coughs]

[[SFX: Nikhil unwraps a lemon drop and eats it]]

NS: Look, as a grown up who can't possibly know what you're going through- hold on. It's too hard to talk around this thing!

[[SFX: Nikhil spits out the lemon drop]]

NS: Ah, that's better. As I was saying, it might seem like the end of the world right now. Actually, when it comes to you guys it might really be the end of the world! [laughs] Wait, that's not helping much either.

P: [laughs]

NS: Ah, there's the begrudging ODAR sense of humor. Kid, if I were you I'd "fly the coop" before whatever happened happens to you.

P: That's not a very... ODAR thing to say.

NS: I'm as dedicated to the cause as the next person! But, I gotta say even I'm a bit adverse to the bigwigs taking children to turn them into... I don't even know what.

P: But they saved us. We were gonna get stuck in foster care.

NS: So you traded one system for another. But did you have a say in any of it?

P: Well... I was really little.

NS: You're still pretty little from my view!

P: Hey!

NS: What? How old are you? 10? 11? That's still pretty darn young.

P: I don't know.

NS: Don't know what?

P: I don't know how old I am. Everywhere we go, it gets harder to keep track.

NS: I'm sorry.

P: I'm not. I don't really care anymore.

NS: Well here, have a lemon drop. My small gift to you for all the birthdays you've missed.

P: Thanks... You know, you talk funny. Not your accent I mean, it's your slang. It's all over the place. And your clothes...

NS: Yeah well, I never did too well studying up on that stuff. It's the 70s, right? Guess I should be saying something like "can ya dig?"

[[SFX: They laugh; Nikhil stands]]

NS: I gotta get goin', kid. Bossman still won't let me use the Timepiece when I'm late for a meeting.

P: Hope I see you around.

NS: I'm always around.

[[SFX: radio tuning; heart monitor beeps; Liam wakes up]]

P: Hey there sleepy head. Carmen was here earlier but had to get some shut eye.

L: *(unintelligible)* You look like you need sleep too.

P: Uh, the nurse said it's better if you try not to talk.

L: *(unintelligible)* Well that's just dumb.

P: I know, it's dumb but... what we did was really dumb Liam.

[[SFX: Liam sits up in the bed]]

P: Here, tap once for yes, two for no.

L: [one tap]

P: Have they talked to you about... about what's gonna happen?

L: [one tap]

P: Are you... are you gonna be okay?

L: [one tap... two tap]

P: Oh. Is it... are you gonna...?

[[SFX: Liam holds Petra's hand]]

P: You know, I'm the one usually holding other people's hands. What if we... what if we go back? You know, stop us from using the–

L: [frantic: taptap, taptap, taptap]

P: I'm just saying we could stop this, we could stop ourselves... oh. We'd have the same problem.

L: [one tap]

P: But it isn't fair! Butterfly Syndrome wasn't supposed to affect us! All that stuff about brain plasticity and using the right verbs and CAGE therapy and, and you're in a hospital bed and we can't do anything about it! But what if we got one of the agents to do it for us?

L: [firm: two taps]

P: Why? If we can save you then, why?

L: *(barely intelligible)* Let me died. Let me having my death.

P: I... I...

L: Please.

P: ...Arrorró mi niño/arrorró mi sol/arrorro pedazo/de mi corazón.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

RAY VICO (RV): No, these children do not get to make such decisions for themselves!

V: With all due respect Agent Vico, these... children haven't been treated as such for a subjectively long time. Their training, this program has made sure of that!

RV: This program is a failure, Van! Look, we wanted to raise agents that were unaffected by Butterfly Syndrome, but there is a boy dying from it as we speak. I send one letter to the Blackroom and we stop all of this from happening. Give me one grounded reason why I shouldn't.

V: Because they asked!

RV: I said grounded!

V: I've been with these kids since the beginning, sir. We've guided them every step of the way but I think it might be time to let them make some of their own decisions. They've seen so much of their past erased, what you want to do will erase their very selves.

RV: And they'll be none the wiser for it.

V: Please, sir. The experiment isn't over. Liam was... is only one case. He's in Tier 1 and may have been too old from the outset. I don't know if the others will be affected as such and if you send that order to the Blackroom none of us will! If there's a chance that the others could develop an immunity, we should at least find out!

RV: Well I'll discuss it with the others but Van, I will have to send something to the Blackroom and at that point, the decision will be made for us.

V: Understood!... Sir.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

V: Carmen, Petra, come with me now.

P: Whuh?

C: What? What's going on?

V: Everybody up, we need to leave.

[[SFX: radio tuning; class walks down hallway]]

V: Alright, we're going to be getting into the nuances of the science behind traveling as a group. Ah yes, hello, if you don't mind I need to show the class the Timepiece.

GUARD 1: I haven't been informed of any... group tour. It's the middle of the night.

V: Sleep deprivation training. We want to ensure that they can recall even the most technical of details on little sleep. I'm sure you're aware of the importance of training these children?

GUARD 1: Well of course but I was given strict orders–

V: Step aside. Please. I won't ask again.

GUARD 1: Sir, without the proper orders I can't–

[[SFX: Van punches the Guard out]]

P: Holy crap!

V: Kids, inside, now.

[[SFX: they enter]]

V: kay kids, now Time Jump Day has come early, and we're going back ahead of schedule. Everyone accounted for? Good.

[[SFX: Van sets the Timepiece]]

C: Aren't we supposed to check the TAP to make sure that it's clear back there?

P: And what about Liam?

V: e don’t have time, I’m sorry.

[[SFX: Van throws the final switch; the Timepiece spools up]]

P: Don’t have time? We’re about to use a time machine!

J: Wait, that guy’s hand is still in the doorway!

V: Jonah, don’t!!

[[SFX: Timepiece activates; half of Jonah sloshes to the floor; children scream]]

P: Jonah!

V: Everyone, close your eyes right now!

[[SFX: someone attempts to open the door]]

V: Kids, behind me. We may not get the reception we’re used to.

[[SFX: door bursts open]]

GUARD : Hands where I can see them!

V: Do as he says, it’s going to be alright. Keep your eyes closed.

GUARD 2: What the hell happened here?

V: I am Agent Van, these children are a part of a sanctioned ODAR experiment. The Blackroom should have a file on us. Before I explain further, may I ask that someone come to escort these children to some rooms, I don’t think they should have to see any more of this.

GUARD 2: Right, right.

[[SFX: walkie squelch]]

GUARD 2: Jones to Smith, I need someone over here to escort some kids and uh... a clean up crew.

V: Would it be alright if they waited for their escort in the hallway?

GUARD 2: Yes, of course. Right this way, kids.

P: Carmen, don’t peek.

C: Too late for that!

P: Wanna hold my hand?

C: Maybe. A little. Yes!

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

C: Audio diary of Carmen... Oh. I don't really have a last name.

P: None of us do.

C: Do you mind?

P: I'm just saying, none of us do. It's a family signifier and since we don't have a family or attachment to any personal history beyond ourselves–

C: Petra, this is a diary. A pastime usually done alone.

P: Right, fine. Sure. I get it, I'll leave the room that we are supposed to share.

[[SFX: Petra exits]]

C: Like I was saying. This is my audio diary. I figured if keeping one was good for the legendary Dr. Sally Grissom then it might help me! The date is July 19th, 1969. We're going to watch the Moon Landing tomorrow. Van thinks it'll help raise morale! Eugh, that's such a military way of saying but I guess it's true after... after what happened to Jonah.

I don't know how he convinced them to continue the experiment but he did. Everyone wants to see this through I guess. I think I do too but it's hard. I've noticed little things, with the Tier 1's. Felicity stuttered the other day. Jerome's memory is a bit foggy. I overheard Hannah from Tier 2 coughing but I'm hoping it's just asthma. Petra keeps getting mad at me because I keep staring at her all the time. The MRIs didn't used to be so... heavy.

They put us in the CAGE now, even us ones that don't show any symptoms! As if it wasn't already hard to keep track of our real age! Some of the teachers look at us... like they pity us but are also a little afraid? I don't blame them. I've tried talking to Petra about all this but she's just so angry all the time now...

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

1961 ANNUONCER (JFK): –Of landing a man on the moon and returning him safely to the earth–

1957 ANNOUNCER: –a special report on Sputnik 1–

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

C: Van! Fatima just collapsed...

V: Help me lift her up, we need to get her… [coughs]

C: It’s okay, I think I can get her, just rest a moment.

V: Oh dammit… [cough] I’m sorry, I’m not quite as young as I will be... am have, used to be–

P: Lean on my arm, Van. You’re alright.

CLERK: Misses Petra and Carmen?

C: Yes, that’s us.

CLERK: And this’ll be Agent Van then?

P: Clearly. Do you–

CLERK: Wheelchair’s just in the hallway.

P: Thank you.

[[SFX: radio tuning; office]]

ER: Uh, hello, Petra, Carmen. A pleasure to meet you. I apologize I couldn’t meet you upon arrival, I honestly didn’t know you were coming.

C: Not a problem. We were able to get all of our tests out of the way.

ER: And I hear you two were completely cleared, I’m looking forward to looking at all the test results.

P: [scoffs] I bet you are.

ER: I’m sorry?

C: And we’d like to thank you, for taking such care of Van.

ER: Of course, I understand that the journey aged him significantly. To be honest, I’m surprised he made it this far with you two.

P: We can thank the CAGE on both counts.

ER: I know, when Sally went through therapy it took a year...

[[SFX: radio tuning; sounds of a park; footsteps approach]]

NS: Hah! Do you know how hard it is to find one person in this place?

P: I’m sorry, do I know you?

NS: Oh, right, it’s been a while for you.

[[SFX: Nikhil takes out the bag of lemon drops]]

NS: Ring a bell?

P: No...wait. You're... you're the Lemon Drop Man?

NS: Actually I prefer Nikhil? Lot less creepy than Lemon Drop Man?

P: But you... I was... is that the same bag?

NS: Yep, tastes a bit off now though. Effects of multiple trips.

P: I know, things get... degraded.

NS: So, what happened? ODAR screw someone else over?

P: [snorts]

NS: Come on, you can tell me.

P: I'm not some kid anymore, Nikhil. I know that you probably just saw me 5 minutes ago, but–

NS: More like an hour, it took a while to find you here.

P: –But as you can see a lot more time has passed for me. I'm not gonna take candy from a stranger and tell them all my secrets.

NS: If I recall correctly, you didn't spill anything last time either.

P: What?

NS: Yeah, you… Mostly you just made fun of the words I use.

P: Oh. Right. You were terrible at fitting in.

NS: Rude!

P: Look at you, you don't sit right in this time either.

NS: Okay, moving on from my apparent inability to blend in... How are you? Really.

P: Why should I tell you anything?

NS: Because I have a feeling no one has asked you that in a while. Or they have but they've only asked it to make sure you're not showing signs of Butterfly Syndrome.

P: [sigh] I think I'm done, Nikhil. I think I might be done with ODAR. And that scares the living shit out of me.

NS: Why?

P: ...Why? You're asking me why? The guy who kept going on about how messed up it was that ODAR experimented on kids in the hopes it could continue its dirty work with greater efficiency?

NS: Not in so many words...

P: I can't remember Liam's voice! I tried to remember Felicity's handwriting. Or Jonah's face... and it's not because I have Butterfly Syndrome. They've checked, and my scans are fine. I don't cough, my verb usage is normal. I can't remember those 🆑things because that's what human memory does! Without... anchors, those memories fade. Do you know what it's like to have your entire life constantly rewritten? Jump, after jump, after jump? I'm adrift. I don't feel connected to anything. The only things that I could hold onto were my class and our chaperone. Now all that's left is me and Carmen and... and Van is on his way out. Soon I won't even have him left.

NS: I'm sorry. I don't think there's much more I can say.

P: Then don't! Unless you have a way that I could stop them, just... shut up and sit there with your candy.

[[SFX: Nikhil opens his pack]]

NS: What if there was something you could do, Petra?

P: Like what?

[[SFX: Nikhil writes a note]]

NS: I can't say much more here but, if you're serious about leaving, find this person when you do.

[[SFX: Nikhil tears paper]]

P: Why should I trust you?

NS: Quite frankly you shouldn't trust anybody in this business. Find them, don't find them, do what you will. But if you want to take back control of your own life, to help stop ODAR making decisions for everyone else, the name on that paper can help.

[[SFX: Petra takes the paper]]

NS: Unfortunately I've another stop to make a year or two back. Goodbye, Petra.

P: Goodbye Nikhil. I hope I see you around.

NS: What did I say last time? I'll always be around.

[[SFX: radio tuning; heart monitor beeps; Van awakens]]

V: *(speaks with great difficulty)* ...Pe-Petra?

C: She's not here right now, she left for some fresh air.

V: Good. Good. Carmen?

C: Yes?

V: Ah, it's… you.

C: Yes, it's me.

V: Mm… Don't... leave.

C: Of course I won't.

V: Mm, mm… Don't... leave…. ODAR.

C: That's not even a question, I wouldn't think of it.

V: They... Petra... Need you.

C: I know.

V: Don't... allow... to happen...

C: Don't allow what...?

V: Mm… I should have stopped...

C: Shh, it's okay.

V: Over there. For Petra.

[[SFX: Carmen picks up the gift]]

C: ...A Rubik's cube?

V: Not the same one. Wooden. Had made here… [breathes easier] Tell her I'm sorry. I'm sorry to you too. Both of you.

C: There's nothing to apologize for… Get some sleep, Van. I'll be right here when you wake up.

[[SFX: radio tuning; microphone in car]]

ER: I'm sorry about Van. None of us knew him though I understand you all knew us fairly well so... I'm sorry.

C: Thank you.

[[SFX: Carmen walks around to the driver's side; Esther hands Petra papers]]

ER: Here's your paperwork, Petra. Everything's been arranged.

P: Much appreciated. Goodbye Ms. Roberts.

ER: Goodbye Petra.

[[SFX: Carmen and Petra get in the car; Carmen turns the ignition; tape fast-forward]]

C: What was that about?

P: What?

C: Don't bullshit me, Petra. What is that paperwork for?

P: Pull over.

C: Pull over? I'm not going to just pull over.

P: The bus station's coming up!

C: And why would that be relevant?

P: Don't bullshit me, Carmen! You know why... I'm leaving.

[[SFX: Carmen pulls over, turns off the car]]

C: I don't understand!

P: What is there to not comprehend? You've known for a while now I was gonna jettison as soon as Van... as soon as... as soon as there wasn't anything left for me.

C: I'm still here!

P: I know. I have two bus tickets. I was hoping–

C: Oh Petra, I can't.

P: Carmen, what do you see in them? They ripped us from our lives on some pretense of saving us, only to turn us into lab rats. Look, I don't know who my mother was, just barely a lullaby. I can't remember the face of my father.

C: We had a father, and we just buried him.

P: You know what I mean! What kid should be made to watch their friends, their family die over and over again? What kid should give up their goddamn birthday? All so, what? So ODAR could have agents without brain damage? No.

I'm done doing what they say. I am going to live my life for once. I am going to move to some town and get some job, and live–forwards. And I want you there with me.

C: I can't go. Not because I don't want to. I do, that sounds... amazing but... ODAR can do a lot of good for a lot of people and I, we, could help with that! Think of the perspective we could bring! We could make sure that no kid goes through what we did.

P: You're not even going to consider the possibility of coming?

C: What would I do out there Petra? Look at me. Do you know how difficult it'd be for me to find a job? To find a neighborhood that doesn't mind me taking my dog for a walk?

P: What do you mean?

C: Jesus, you've never had to think about this because you don't look Latina! I used to have people follow me around stores when we were kids. And as soon as we passed the 60s, it got even worse. So don't tell me it's as easy as getting on a bus, and [OBJ]finding some town, and getting some job, and living some life because that's not the reality I live in!

P: Carmen, I–

C: –Didn't know. I get it. I never brought it up because I didn't want you to feel bad but there was a reason I didn't go out as much when we got older and it's not because I wanted to continue quizzing myself on Spanish slang of 19-fifty-whatever!

P: And you're okay with staying with the organization that's responsible for taking you back to a time when people treat you that way?

C: Stop being so combative! ODAR isn't perfect but they don't see me as some brown girl who's gonna steal something. It's a mutually beneficial relationship. I work at a place that respects me for me, and in return I can go into spaces other agents can't. I'm not that little girl whose hand you held to lead her away from danger.

P: I was hoping to take you to something better.

[[SFX: Petra holds up the ticket]]

P: Will you at least take the ticket? You can exchange it for a later time in case you change your mind.

C: Okay.

[[SFX: Petra hands Carmen the ticket]]

P: I guess this is goodbye.

C: I don't think I've ever said that to you.

P: Me neither.

C: Bye, Petra.

P: Bye, Carmen.

[[SFX: car door opens, Petra gets out]]

C: Wait!

[[SFX: Carmen picks up the Rubik's Cube]]

C: Van wanted you to have it.

P: ...Don't take anything with you, remember? Old habits die hard.

[[SFX: door shuts]]

C: *(crying)* Arrorró mi niño/ arrorró mi sol/ duérmase pedazo/ de mi corazón...

[[tape recorder stops]]

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ars PARADOXICA is created by Daniel Manning and Mischa Stanton.
Episode 17: Plasticity features -

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Ai-Chan & Gabriela Milo (Carmen)
Ian McQuown (Van)
Katie Speed (Esther Roberts)
Arjun Gupta (Nikhil Sharma)
Richard Malmos (Ray Vico)
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21 26 09 19 04 04 10 07 | 21 07 06 23 21 04 10 | 01 19 10 22 | 01 01 18 22 06 17 | 08 05 19 14 08 11 15 20 11 22
WEATHER: hail

18: Boundary

STORY CONCEPTS BY ERIN BARK
WRITTEN, DIRECTED & SOUND DESIGN BY MISCHA STANTON

[[SFX: tape recorder starts]]

ANTHONY PARTRIDGE (AP): Hello! And welcome back to the continuing adventures of Anthony Partridge and the Desk Clerk's Office Without Time. Today I have stumbled upon a rather interesting quirk of my Philadelphia forever-home. Sure, it may have cost me a few of my precious medical supplies, but that's a small price to pay around here for something new and exciting.

I had cleared out my queue, and while waiting for the system to refresh I was killing time by building a rubber band ball. Now, before you go asking, yes I do have a ton of office supplies here, and yes rubber bands do seem like a particularly odd choice. All I do here is shift documents from one place to another, right? It's all paper, audio tape, microfilm, that sort of stuff. So, paper clips? Sure, logical, yes. Staples? Okay! A little destructive of the documents for me, but covering my bases ODAR, I appreciate it. I mean what I really want is a great big cork board and some push-pins. Maybe some string or something? I don't know. But Rubber bands? What am I holding together with rubber bands? Just seems like an odd choice, guys, that's all I'm saying.

So, right, the rubber band ball. Now they've included all the entertainment a guy could ask for in the Blackroom–books, music, movies, TV shows on tape, and disc. But what I don't have are a ton of facilities for physical activity. See the Blackroom itself is pretty big, they found a pretty empty patch of the Eldridge to set me down on But with all the stuff in here it's kinda cramped. I keep up a basic exercise regimen to ward off atrophy and the like, but... I get antsy. Often. So I built this rubber band ball. For kicks. And I'm bouncing it, right, and then I think, "y'know, what might happen if I were to toss this at the boundary?"

I don't talk about the boundary much. To be perfectly honest, it kinda gives me the creeps. Most of the time the boxes and crates and shelves in the way let me keep my distance. The few times I've touched it... There's definitely a hard surface there. It's like a concrete wall. Only it's warm to the touch, and it gives just a little more than you'd expect. It's like my nerve endings can't quite make sense of what they're picking up, like the information is invalid or corrupted. My somatosensory system crosses a wire. And because the moisture in the air can't escape anywhere, the pressure condensation gets forced up against your hand, so you hand comes away wet. It almost feels... alive. That along with the drone of the CAGE generator... Breathing. Pulsing. Like the belly of a whale.

So, right, so I have this rubber band ball, and I'm thinking, "okay, what would happen?" So I throw it. Lightly at first.

[[SFX: the ball bounces off the CAGE boundary; Anthony catches it]]

AP: See, but it bounces further than I expected. I have to reach to catch it. But now I'm curious, right? So of course, I chuck the darn thing as hard as I can. And it hits me right in the face, full speed.

Normally this is the part where I ice my face and my ego, but when I say "full speed" I mean almost entirely the same speed! Which is weird, because any other surface absorbs at least a little bit of the kinetic energy as heat upon impact–Newton's Third Law, and all. But this thing came flying back at me and I swear to God it was the same speed as when I threw it.

So it's all swirling in my head. The ball, the warm touch, this crazy spectacular ECHO [echo, echo]... I think the boundary is 100% reflective inwards. I mean, of course, it would have to be. It's a complete and total blockade between me and the entire rest of the universe. But I've never really dived into exactly what that means. Which can only mean that there are some experiments in my future. Oh, Sally's gonna love this!

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

SALLY GRISSOM (SG): I mean, it sounds rad Partridge! You know you can count me in for whatever you need.

[[SFX: door opens]]

ESTHER ROBERTS (ER): *(in distance)* Sally! Hey, the door was open, I hope it's ok–

SG: Oh, uh, gotta go. Let me know the details. Bye!

[[SFX: hangs up phone]]

SG: Hey Roberts, I'm back here!

ER: *(approaching)* Hey, how are you doing?

SG: I'm good. I didn't expect you today, you were just here yesterday.

ER: Oh, I'm sorry. I just had an unexpectedly light day, is it alright? If you need some space, I–

SG: No, no, it's totally fine! I'll just finish this up later. D'you wanna play cards?

[[SFX: radio tuning; Newton's cradle clacking against the Boundary]]

AP: I am going to die.

This is not a new revelation. In fact it's something that comes up a lot here, with just me, alone with my thoughts. But today I'm faced with empirical evidence that even in this entirely closed system, entropy will decay my body and mind and I will still die.

Hear this?

[[SFX: clacking]]

AP: This is a Newton's cradle I built out of some ball bearings and twine. One side of it is resting up against the boundary, so that when I drop the ball on one side, it immediately bounces back up with near-identical force. I say "near-identical" because even if the boundary is 100% reflective, there's still heat being absorbed by each of the balls in the line. There's still kinetic energy lost to the air as the end ball rises. After an hour or so, the ball rising just a little less than the time before, it's finally starting to slow down.

And it got me thinking. Sure, the Blackroom's environment was ionized the minute it activated, killing all bacteria in the area. Sure, I've got plenty of medical supplies to last me a good long while. But even if I stay fit as a fiddle, even if I live my allotted decades and then some... Eventually I'm going to die in here. From some complication that can't be solved, some disease they didn't know about in my time... Or hell, even by old age. Which isn't actually a thing so much as a nice way to dress up organ failure.

The one thing that really scares me about all of it is that I don't really have any recourse left to me in the event of a slow, torturous decline. That is, unless I want to burn one of the Catboxes.

I'm not sure I've ever really ruminated about them on the record. Basically, ODAR's done a pretty good job so far in providing whatever I may need. In fact, beyond human company, I haven't wanted for much of anything while I've been here. But–and believe me when I tell you I am utterly aware of the irony of what I'm about to say–ODAR can't predict everything. They knew that something catastrophic might happen in here, something they couldn't possibly plan for.

So: In among the various stacks there are sixteen wooden crates, nailed shut. And the way it works is, sixteen times over the course of my life, I can ask ODAR for a specific item, name a crate, open it, and there it'll be. And sure, each of the crates has something inside it right now, and sure, I could pry each of them open and see what's in them. But what a waste that would be! Because until I open one, a box could contain anything. Literally any conceivable thing could be in there, until I open it and see it with my own two eyes. The theory is based on a thought experiment proposed by Erwin Schrodinger. It was proposed as a joke, but he had no idea how useful the joke would be when it came down to the nitty-gritty of quantum mechanics. His experiment involved a cat in a box, thus: Catboxes.

So I've got sixteen of these things. Sixteen genie's wishes, as it were, to provide me whatever I need, on demand. But what's wrinkling my brain today is, am I going to have to save the last

one until I'm standing at death's door? Will I have to request a heavy dose of morphine, or a bolt gun? Is the instrument of my ultimate destruction sitting ten feet away from me, even now?

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

AP: *(on phone)* Sally, listen, I've been thinking about it a lot lately, and... I don't want to die alone. I know I'm stuck here and I know it's for a reason and I know I deserve whatever's coming to me, but... What, am I just supposed to sit on my hands and wait for death? I guess it's just... Not in me not to rage against the dying of the light.

So between my shifts at the console I've been working on this design, and well... I'm no expert in quantum field theory, that's you. But I think if we can figure out a way to negate the strong force the way you did with the Higgs field, it might destabilize the gluon barrier of the CAGE and... I might actually be able to get out of here!

What do you think? It's worth a shot, right?

[[SFX: click; Sally redials the Blackroom]]

SG: Partridge... I don't know. I mean, I feel for you, I really do. No one wants to die alone. But think about it: If I let you out, the entire Blackroom will appear on the deck of the Eldridge. That's the very first thing that ever happened to me in the past, and I definitely don't remember a ludicrous pile of boxes, tapes and documents falling out of the future with me. It was just me. So messing with that moment, and by extension potentially messing with every moment that's come after it... That's a big ask. I'm doing my best to live in the present these days. And that's just a string I don't know if I want to pull. It could unravel... Everything.

You don't have to be alone on your final days. You can always call me. I'm here for you. But... I'm sorry. I just don't think it's a good idea. [sigh]

[[SFX: Sally hangs up; the phone rings; Sally answers]]

AP: *(on phone)* Really? You're not even going to consider the possibility? Where's the Sally Grissom I know? The one who laughed in the face of known physics and told the universe to shove it? You would have jumped at a chance to make something like this back when I was free. This is cold, Sally.

[[SFX: click; Sally redials]]

SG: She learned a few lessons the hard way, and now she takes care of herself first. I'm sorry Anthony, it's just too dangerous to my mental health. And I've got to prioritize that now. I can't do this. Don't ask me to do this.

[[SFX: Sally hangs up; the phone rings and rings; radio tuning]]

SG: I mean, he's right of course. The old me would have jumped at this. It feels a little wrong not to consider it, at least.

DR. FITZGERALD (DR.F): But you're not the old you, Sally. You've come a long way. You've succumbed to reckless behavior in the past, and I'm sorry to pour salt on the wound but it doesn't always work out for those closest to you. I'm proud of you, that you took a moment to consider the consequences of this line of discovery, before you got yourself so entrenched in thought that you ended up hurting someone. Especially if that someone is yourself.

SG: Okay, but what makes me more worth considering than Partridge? He's trapped in the work-release program from hell, and... All he wants is not to die alone. And I'm robbing him of that.

DR.F: But is curing Anthony's loneliness worth putting yourself at risk? Sally, you have value! You're more than just your brain, you're more than just what you can contribute to society. You have worth just by being. And I really wish you'd see that, and not beat yourself up so badly over an unnecessarily risky move.

SG: I know that...

DR.F: You say that, but do you believe it? I'm here to help you believe it.

SG: Y... Yeah. I know I'm more than just a genius scientist. I do.... What? I do!

[[SFX: radio tuning; Sally laying blueprints flat]]

SG: Okay, but like was I really just going to leave a stone unturned? Come on. I'd like to think my diary knows me better than that by now. My problem is that I don't really have access to the materials anymore, but depending on what materials he has with him in the Blackroom, he might be able to make it work.

[[SFX: Esther opens the door; Sally scrambles to hide the blueprints]]

ER: Hey Sally, I was wondering if... what's all that?

SG: Uh, nothing! Just working on a, um, an extension to the greenhouse! It's getting a little, uh–

ER: Sally?

SG: Hmm?

ER: You know you're a horrendous liar, right?

SG: [sigh] So I've been told.

ER: [laughs] Sally, it's okay! You're allowed to have your secrets. Lord knows, I have mine. We'll just steer clear of the mysterious blueprints, shall we?

SG: ...Really?

ER: Yes, of course. Everyone's got some right to privacy.

SG: Roberts... you're in a top position at an intelligence agency. Your entire job revolves around invading other people's privacy.

ER: Not my friends though.

SG: That seems a little nepotistic, but... okay I guess.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

SG: *(on phone)* –so just have an agent pick it up in the next 40 years or so and you should be good to go. Let me know if you can make it work. Actually... I guess if it works it won't really matter, because history'll be pretty different. Good luck anyway.

[[SFX: click; Anthony typing]]

AP: I'll send it to, oh, 1972, delta point-five-four from Blackroom center. That oughta do it. And then that should be...

[[SFX: Anthony stands, looks around the Blackroom for the file]]

AP: Aha! Okay, here it is.

[[SFX: Anthony unfurls blueprints]]

AP: Hmm, let's see here... Okay... Hmm. So it's a gluon emitter? It sort of bombards the barrier, like a diamond-tipped drill. I'm either gonna need to cannibalize some parts from the computer–not really an option if I don't want ODAR poking their noses in–or... or I'll have to burn another one of the Catboxes. I felt a little stupid having to use the first one. I wanted something a little more interactive to keep my brain agile, something more than movies and TV programs. They sent me this handheld computer, made by some Japanese company. Nintendo? It came with these little cartridges with games on them. I'm getting pretty good at Tee-tris.

But it made me feel pretty dumb. I mean, I get 16 boxes of whatever I want, and no more, for my whole life, and I splurge on a toy? So no more splurging. If I'm burning another box, I've got to be sure it's what I want to do. And Sally's right, me breaking out of here carries considerable risk. Not just to me, but to Sally, to anyone connected with ODAR... To Helen. Is it worth messing with her life further just to see the sun again, even if it's just one last time?

... I don't know. As it stands, I'm young, I'm fit. I think I can wait a while before I'd try to use this. But I think it'll be nice to have the option available to me, in any case.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

ER: Dr. Fitzgerald, thank you for making the time to see me.

DR.F: Of course.

[[SFX: door closes]]

ER: How's your daughter?

DR.F: She's improving.

ER: The gene therapy's working?

DR.F: For now. They're hesitant to call it a full cure–of course it's all still relatively new to them–but her immunity is bouncing back.

ER: Good. That's wonderful. I'm glad.

DR.F: Ms. Roberts, forgive me, but you made it sound rather urgent on the phone, and I've had to reschedule a patient–

ER: Of course, I'll be quick. We need to know what Sally's been working on.

DR.F: Uh… Much of what she tells me goes a bit over my head. Between the greenhouse, the telephone charger, the ridiculous Rube Goldberg–style breakfast machine... It's gets hard to keep track.

ER: Is there any chance she mentioned anything about a black room at all?

DR.F: You mean the one where you're keeping Anthony Partridge?

ER: ...Dammit Sally–Yes, that would be the one.

DR.F: I become increasingly uncomfortable in this position, Ms. Roberts. This is not the kind of thing I signed up for.

ER: I'm sorry, Doctor, did you forget who's little Lindy's benefactor?

DR.F: I think you sometimes forget that your employees are eople, not just pawns on a chessboard.

ER: I prefer a deck of cards to a chessboard. And Sally's not an employee.

DR.F: Is there anything in particular you're looking for? I have other patients to see, you only cancelled one of them.

ER: Sally's building something, but she won't tell me what. I only caught a glimpse of the blueprint–

DR.F: You know, I really don't like pretending that she has no reason not to trust you.

ER: I'll only ask one more time: What is she building?

DR.F: She's working on something to break a glue wall? I think that's what she said.

ER: A gluon wall?

DR.F: Sure, if that makes sense to you.

ER: And how's it going?

DR.F: He hasn't gotten back to her yet.

ER: Wait, Sally and Anthony are talking?

DR.F: You didn't know? They've been in contact since before we started our sessions.

ER: ...Let me know when she hears from him again, will you?

[[SFX: Esther exits; radio tuning]]

AP: It's not gonna work this way, Sally. The barrier is 100% inwardly reflective, so if I try to bombard the barrier from the inside all the energy will reflect inside the Blackroom. What we need is for someone to use the gluon drill from outside the Blackroom. But since it only exists for a single instant in 1943, I'd need you to travel all the way back to the Eldridge with the drill already running, and I'm not going to let another woman to give up her entire life just for my sake. I already made that mistake once. I'll have to try something else. I'll call you back.

[[SFX: Anthony types]]

AP: So I'm not gonna be able to breach the barrier from the inside. Maybe I can weaken it from the outside? The Eldridge keeps all the energy condensed here indefinitely, but... I don't know, maybe another anchor point might weaken the boundary enough to cause a collapse? Let me see...

[[SFX: Anthony typing; radio tuning]]

DAVID MARIAN (DM): –I can put myself in a position to scrub President Truman's staff of Communist influence once and for all, well in advance of his speech. I've got a list here of people we'll definitely need to look into further.

[[SFX: David hands Chet a file

CHET WHICKMAN (CW): Agent Marian, thank you for bringing this to us. This is an exemplary brief. How far back do you want to go?

DM: No further than ‘45. Thought I’d start with Elizabeth Bentley and build from there. I’m gonna be there to meet her off the boat. I’d like to be the first friendly face she sees. Might be more willing to open up to me than to Hoover’s boys–

[[SFX: door opens]]

ER: Chet, we’ve gotta talk about Anthony.

CW: [sigh] Good work, David. Get the paperwork in order and we’ll fast-track it to the Blackroom for analysis. Dismissed.

DM: Yes sir. *(to Esther)* Ma’am.

ER: Agent Marian.

[[SFX: David exits]]

CW: So, he wants to break out of the Blackroom. Could he do it?

ER: I... You’re not mad?

CW: [sigh] Do you think he could do it?

ER: Well, I don’t know. We gave him those crates to do with as he pleases, and it’s not like he’d send a memo if he requested something from the future he didn’t want me knowing about. Technically,he’s one in charge of all the information we know, and unless you’ve noticed any actively diverted operations, we can’t call him out or expend resources to investigate. So unless or until we find a red flag in Anthony’s work we can’t do anything about it. And by the time he escapes–

CW: –History will already have changed so drastically as to render basically all of our contingency plans moot. And we can’t relay any new contingencies to accommodate because they’d all have to pass through him to get back to us.

ER: The one flaw in the Blackroom system: Anthony actually getting over his guilt.

CW: Or refocusing it. You know, I kinda thought that reservoir was a little deeper, but I can’t say as I’m surprised. Anthony’s ego is a bulwark.

ER: So... what should we do?

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

AP: Sally, I'm looking over the file from the Nikhil Sharma incident. How much confidence did you have in his theory? I've looked over the diagram of the Rainbow generator after he worked on it, but I guess I'm not quite sure how a second anchor point would have allowed you to travel forwards. As far as I can tell it might destabilize the tachyon flow enough to disperse the gluon barrier on my end, but I get the feeling there's something I'm overlooking. Let me know.

[[SFX: Anthony types; alert beep]]

SG: *(on phone)* They closed off the area before I could really take a look at what he was doing, but I've done some calculations based on what I remember from the road trip and it seemed like a solid plan? I dunno. He had sixty-some years to figure it out, I just sorta trusted his process.

AP: That's... not entirely convincing.

[[SFX: alert beep]]

AP: Another one?

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

ER: So… what should we do?

CW: What if we just... Gave him the information he wants?

[[SFX: radio tuning; alert beep]]

AP: Another one?

[[SFX: Anthony typing]]

ER: Anthony. Listen, I know you're lonely. You're afraid. But what you want to do... Anthony, it could destroy everything. Not just ODAR, but... the whole world.

After the Sharma incident was filed away, I had Griggs and Archer take a look into it. And they ran the numbers on tachyon traffic between two anchor points. The problem is that with more than one anchor point, particles are pulled in two directions, and so they end up splitting the difference. Anything that's ever travelled in time crumbles to subatomic dust and gets scattered across spacetime. But because they never reform into any cohesive body, the mass becomes energy and radiation spreads across the entire interim distance between the departure point and the anchor points. And then it gets worse.

The radiation spreads. Across the whole country. The whole planet. It's an Endgame scenario, Anthony. I'm including the report in the Endgame files, you can see for yourself.

We don't have any evidence that this wasn't Sharma's plan from the start.

Sally doesn't want to hear it. She won’t listen to a thing you say against Nikhil Sharma. It's a sore point with her. But he really could have destroyed everything. And you could too.

I’m sorry, Anthony, but the world isn’t a price we can afford to pay for your freedom. It’s just not. I hope you understand.

[[SFX: click]]

AP: [sigh]

[[SFX: Anthony searches for the Endgame files; finds the one he wants; flips pages]]

AP: ...How did Sally miss this?

[[SFX: Anthony flips more pages]]

AP: I can’t believe this didn’t occur to her!

[[SFX: Anthony slaps the file on the desk]]

AP: In fairness... Sally did only invent time travel accidentally. The obvious doesn’t always occur to her until it’s too late.

[[SFX: radio tuning; Esther hangs up the phone]]

ER: That should do it.

CW: I sure hope so.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

SG: *(on phone)* What do you mean, drop it? You're the one that convinced me to look into it! Could you just–wow, I never understood “blue balls” until right now. Do me a favor: Don't get me started down a path unless you want to see it through.

AP: What do I say? What can I say to convince her that she’s not fit to pursue this? She’s right, I asked her to do this for me. But I'm so used to Sally firing on all cylinders... There are gaps in her logic. I guess I never saw it before. Maybe there were gaps in mine.

She’s been through a lot, she’s been away from ODAR for years now... But honestly? I don't know if she could take it. Intelligence is her identity. Lord knows, I know what that's like. And when I found out that I’d played into the hands of someone with a destructive agenda? I sabotaged my whole future. And I won't let Sally make my mistakes. Not if I can help it.

[[SFX: typing]]

AP: I'm sorry, Sally, you were absolutely right. Listen, I'm gonna keep looking into it, and if I find anything interesting I'll let you know, okay? Be well.

[[SFX: Anthony typing; radio tuning]]

SG: Diary of Sally Grissom, October 17, 1950. I'm done with Partridge for a little while. He's a selfish manipulative ass, and he just presses my buttons to amuse himself. What, he doesn't have enough TV shows to binge in the Blackroom?

Ugh, whatever. It's fine. I've got pumpkins to look after, and Halloween's right around the corner.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

AP: They need to know!

[[SFX: typing]]

AP: *(as he types)* "Alert: Nikhil Sharma is NOT the only rogue to attempt creation of a second anchor point. In the event such an attempt is successful The Blackroom predicts severe unavoidable global catastrophe. Be on extreme lookout: you only get one shot."

[[SFX: tape recorder stops]]

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ars PARADOXICA is created by Daniel Manning & Mischa Stanton.
Episode 18: Boundary features -

Kristen DiMercurio (Sally Grissom)
Reyn Beeler (Chet Whickman)
Katie Speed (Esther Roberts)
Robin Gabrielli (Anthony Partridge)
Richard Penner (Dr. Fitzgerald)
Alexander Cole (David Marian)
with special thanks to Isabel Atkinson

Original music by Mischa Stanton and by Eno Freedman-Brodmann.
ars PARADOXICA is brought to you by The Internet: Cmd-Shift-N. Trust me.

14 12 02 22 19 | 14 17 | 08 | 15 19 21 23 22 | 05 05 20 05 10 16
WEATHER: thunderstorms

19: Gumshoe

WRITTEN BY JULIAN MUNDY
DIRECTED & SOUND DESIGN BY MISCHA STANTON

[[SFX: tape recorder starts]]]

LOU GAINES (LG): Well, the other shoe dropped, finally. Not on any list, they tell me, but this is the end of Louis Gaines, professor of... well, anything. "Clean out your desk and bump on down the road, hear?" But that's fine, you know... That's fine. Had my fill of that place anyway. I put some savings aside, that'll hold me for a while, and I have another job to do besides. David's been gone two months on the job for that creepy Mr. Beck, and I've had precisely no word from him. Beck and his "grassroots defense initiatives" may have him working pretty hard, but this... I don't know. It feels wrong. Expected a letter or a call as soon as he got settled, but here I am. Two months and not so much as a chess move by mail. That's not the David Marian I know. I got no address, no number to call, so as I see it, there's nothing for it but for me drag this thing out–

[[SFX: Lou shakes the recorder]]

LG: –and do the gumshoe routine again. But before that, I'm going to cook up a nice supper, put on a good record, and pour myself a drink. Or five! Oh, right, this is entry one of new field notes, Louis Gaines, August 14th, 1949...

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

LG: *(a little hungover)* Field notes, entry two, August 15th. It's about two in the afternoon, I just spoke to David's mother, Ruth, who says she hasn't heard from him since I have. Dammit, this isn't working! All I've done so far today is spin my wheels trying to get someone to say two useful words to me. I've got one option left, and, shit, it could go 50/50 either way. But, Jim Colfax was always a man who knows how to play the game. It was a damn miracle he got me off with an honorable discharge. But he's a clever man... I'll have to come in prepared.

[[SFX: radio tuning; phone ringback]]

LT. COL. JAMES COLFAX (JC): *(on phone)* Colfax.

LG: Jim? It's Gaines.

JC: Well I'll be a monkey's uncle, Louis Gaines! That's a surprise.

LG: How've you been keeping?

JC: Can't complain, you know me. Youngest lieutenant colonel since Don Vickers, and they make sure I can keep my kid fat and happy. Now, truth be told, I can't imagine what you might need from me after all this time.

LG: It's about David Marian.

JC: Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, I can't get him off of anything else! He's a civilian, it's not --

LG: Nothing like that! David isn't in trouble with the law, but I don't know that he isn't in trouble. It's not easy to explain. A few weeks back, I was approached by someone saying he worked for the State Department, went by the name of Beck. He had a job offer for me, something intelligence related, and I told him I'd only think about it if David got a shot at the job too.

JC: Are you about to come to a point?

LG: The oin is, he got the job, I didn't, and the reason why ain't on the table for discussion. We talk often. We're friends, brothers in arms. We knew each other's mind. But as soon as he ships off for this training with Beck, no word. "You never call, you never write," like that! I don't expect anything from you, Jim. I just want to make sure my friend is safe.

JC: [sigh] ...I did still owe you one, didn't I?

LG: I'll let your heart advise you on that point, Jim. I need to look at him in the flesh or hear his voice say he's okay, you get me? I need copies of whatever records you can access that reference government contracts in the public sector during the war. Anyone who got tapped to work on something special or urgent.

JC: Christ, when you ask, you ask. I could be risking my shiny new career over this.

LG: You mean to tell me you have no juice over there?

JC: [aughs] You bastard. Fine. I don't know of any Beck, but I'm not sure there isn't one in the State Department. Expect a hand delivery. And Lou?

LG: Yeah?

JC: That's us all square. Don't call again.

[[SFX: Jim hangs up; radio tuning]]

LG: Field notes, entry 16. September 17th. Would you look at all of it!

[[SFX: Lou shoves a box open, riffles through folders]]

LG: Accounting records, cargo manifests, a mountain of irrelevant garbage, but there's gold in them hills! I can smell it! That old smell that tells you

where the story is. Now I should make some coffee if I'm going to make it through all this before Christmas.

[[SFX: radio tuning; a record plays]]

LG: [yawn] Field notes, entry 17. Whatsit? September 19th. Ran out of coffee six hours ago, but I should have a working list to start from in oh, another day?

[[SFX: Lou turns off the record player]]

LG: Going to run down to the diner, put some fuel in the tank, and [awn] get back to it. I'll tell you what, my phone bill is going to cause me some pain in the days to come. I must be the busiest unemployed man in America.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

LG: Field notes, entry 18, September 21st. Spent yesterday calling a bunch of scientists' wives after a solid twenty-four hours shuteye. Not everyone would agree to speak to me, no surprise there, but the ones who would were nice enough women. Husband's always off at work, wouldn't you know it, except in a couple cases, and they didn't know anything. And then. Then I get this string of women in Evanston, all of whom could confirm that their husband had done some classified work for the government, but clammed up over specifics. Still more digging to do. [sniff] Need a hot bath first. [sniff]

[[SFX: radio tuning; a record plays; phone rings, Lou picks up]]

LG: Louis Gaines speaking.

JUNE BARLOWE (JB): *(on phone)* Hello? Mr. Gaines? I hope this isn't a bad time, I know it's late. I'm calling from Evanston. My name is June Barlowe.

LG: Oh, no ma'am, this is a fine time. How can I help you?

JB: I'm not completely sure. I was speaking to Patty Fitzroy, and she mentioned your call, asking about her husband's work.

LG: Er, yes ma'am, I'm a journalist. I'm conducting some research for a story.

JB: A story about those freaks at ODAR?

LG: What can you tell me, Mrs. Barlowe?

JB: That remains to be seen.. you have to be careful who you talk to these days. I'm doing a... a bit of an investigation myself... no, no this was a mistake, I really can't risk--

LG: Mrs. Barlowe, this is... I'm grateful you called me with this, please don't hang up. I am trying to find my friend, a young man I was supposed to look

after. I think they have him and I can't do a thing about it. Whatever you can tell me, please, I need to hear it.

JB: ...So this isn't about some story for the papers.

LG: No, just someone looking out for a friend in need. You said you were looking into ODAR yourself? Do you know someone missing?

JB: No, you see my husband, Quentin... well never mind that. What matters is that I'm looking into them and whatever they're up to. I have to follow any lead I can get.

LG: Mrs. Barlowe, it appears that we're both after similar goals. We might benefit from working together, risky as that may be.

JB: Mr. Gaines, you seem to care very deeply for your friend but I have been waiting too long to make rash decisions now. As much as I'd like to trust you, I'll have to think it over. Good evening.

[[SFX: June hangs up; Lou shuts off the record player]]

LG: This shit is gonna give me an ulcer, I swear!

[[SFX: Lou slams the receiver; radio tuning; record plays; phone rings, Lou answers]]

LG: Louis Gaines speaking.

JB: *(on phone)* I've thought it over. We'll have to be careful, Mr. Gaines.You don't know what they can do.

LG: Then tell me what you know, please. You mentioned a Quentin, your husband I presume?

JB: [sigh] Yes, he worked in their lab about four years ago. Mad scientists, doing secret projects to end the war. They were–and I know how this will sound–they were building a working time machine.

LG: A... time machine. I see. You've seen it working, this–?

JB: Time machine, yes. I stood just feet away while it made this terrible noise. It was me and that bitch Sally Grissom, there was a gun and... and it fired. But it hit my husband in the lab somehow, one week before. She made that possible and yet she got to stay while they kicked me to the curb. I guess they did the math and decided I wasn't worth worrying about.They are very dangerous people, Mr. Gaines. They have to be stopped.

LG: I'm not sure what it is I can do, ma'am. I'm sorry. I'm just trying to find my friend.

JB: He won't be easy to find. They buried me under a false identity for years, they can bury him too. I've been digging up information myself but if you want my help, we go in this together. A partnership, sharing information as equals. I won't be swept aside again, Mr. Gaines.

LG: I think I can agree to that, Mrs. Barlowe. Now, you said you've found something?

JB: Esther Roberts, she was one of the scientists there. I made an inquiry at the alumni office at the University of Chicago. All I got was that she was close friends with someone named Bridget Chambers, maiden name Dreyfuss. Their records said that she works at the Public Library in New York City. I meant to go see her, but it's a long way from Illinois.

LG: I'm closer, I can look into it. Thank you, Mrs. Barlowe.

JB: I'm looking forward to us speaking again, Mr. Gaines. Tell me what you find out.

LG: Of course, Mrs. Barlowe. And please, you can call me Lou.

JB: And you can call me June. Until next time.

[[SFX: June hangs up; radio tuning; a New York sidewalk]]

LG: Field notes, October 12th. Here I go.

[SFX: Lou enters the library, crosses the lobby]]

LG: Pardon me, where might I find the reference desk?... Thank you, ma'am.

[[SFX: Lou proceeds; Bridget approaches]]

BRIDGET CHAMBERS (BC): Good morning, sir. Need help finding something?

LG: Someone, as a matter of fact. Would you happen to be Bridget Chambers, by any chance?

BC: ...Yes, how can I help you?

LG: Well, Mrs. Chambers, the truth is you come highly recommended. Arthur Meadows over in the DSU history department mentioned you when I discussed my latest project with him. Oh, pardon me, my name is Louis Gaines. I'm the journalism professor over there.

BC: I can't say that I recall... Well, nevermind. What can I do for you, Professor?

LG: I'm in the middle of some research, and Arthur tells me you have a pretty comprehensive knowledge of this place.

BC: The subject?

LG: It's a piece on government subcontracting in wartime. We're still just coming out of a major armed conflict, there are big areas of economic growth, a lot of history being made. Anything you can show me on our government contracting with private firms for war work or domestic defense would be a great help. Now I'm mostly interested in a Dr. Esther Roberts. She was one of only a few women to rise to prominence in the scientific field during that time.

BC: ...My, that does sound interesting, Professor Gaines. Well, we have reading rooms set aside, just follow the signs. Just make sure you find the right one, all right? I'll give the stacks a look and be with you in a jiffy!

[[SOUND: Bridget exits]]

LG: Thank you kindly{.}

[[SFX: radio tuning; phone rings, Lou picks up]]

LG: Louis Gaines speaking.

BC: *(on phone)* No "professor" this time?

LG: I'm sorry, I don't understand–

BC: Don't give me that, Mr. Gaines, please. I called DSU to update my records. They say you don't teach anything anymore. I would like an explanation.

LG: You are absolutely right, Mrs. Chambers–

BC: And more than that, you knew there was a connection between Ettie Roberts and myself. So talk, or I call the police!

LG: Of course. The nub of it is, I'm looking for my friend, I believe he might be in trouble, maybe even in some sort of danger. I'm sorry I lied to you, but I couldn't think of any other way to be allowed down into the reference section.

BC: Most people don't need a story to get into a library.

LG: Most people ou kno, ma'am. Do you know a lot of Negros, Mrs. Chambers? You certainly know the accepted social etiquette around them.

BC: What do government contracts have to do with your missing friend? You can't go to the police, or... Or a private detective, or something?

LG: I can't go to the police for several reasons, most of which I scarcely need to mention. But most of all, I believe he's being exploited somehow by

people far out of my reach. Truth be told, ma'am, it feels like all I'm doing is treading water.

BC: I... I'm sorry, Mr. Gaines. It's quite a story. Who is this friend you think is in trouble?

LG: His name is David Marian, ma'am, and he's a young man who deserves to have somebody in his corner. I hope you'll forgive my shabby treatment of you. My friends call me Lou.

BC: ...What can I do to help, Lou?

LG: I need you to find anything you can on an organization called the Office of Developed Anomalous Resources, or ODAR. They've got some connection to intelligence, but the name doesn't give much away. They have their fingers in a lot of pies, and probably won't often ask for things under their own name. Just… just be careful. This all started when they found me sitting in my damn truck, if you'll pardon me.

BC: You be careful too. I'll send you copies of whatever I can find.

LG: And this a long shot, but your friend, Roberts? You may want to keep an eye out. Buy a tape recorder. They may already know that something is happening and try to head us off. I can't get into the details, especially the gory ones, but she's not the person you remember.

BC: I don't know about this, Lou. We used to be close, maybe I shouldn't get involved with this after all.

LG: I understand. Don't do anything, then, but keep a recording device close by. Just in case she shows, Bridget. I don't want you sticking your neck out for any reason, but if she shows, you have to be ready.

BC: Alright, Lou. Alright, I will. This is just completely crazy, you know?

LG: Ma'am, these days, I pinch myself on an hourly basis, just to be sure.

[[SFX: radio tuning; tape recorder plays]]

BC: *(on tape)* Alright, she's gone. I'm going to edit that first part out of the record for decency's sake… but you were right. She wanted to recruit me. When you pick up the tapes tomorrow, leave a signal if you want me to follow her companion as well. I'm sorry I doubted you, Gaines. We'll talk soon.

LG: Huh. Well, uh... Field notes, October 29th. Well, this confirms a few things. Finally have a live recording of Roberts making a move, but nothing to indicate she knows something more about Bridget's involvement. Either we're doing something right, or we're about to run bare-assed into an ambush.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

BC: *(on phone)* Did it... did it come out all right? I was so embarrassed, I was afraid I rushed getting it to you and damaged something.

LG: You did brilliantly! Couldn't have asked for better.

BC: You must think the most awful things about me...

LG: I could never. Anyone who does, doesn't have the sense God gave a rat.

BC: You're sweet.

LG: Bridget, I work with the truth. That's what reporters do. So here it is: you've done a great thing. You might even have saved a life or two. I only hope I can rely on you in the future.

BC: [niffs] Yes. You can rely on me.

[[SFX: radio tuning; a record plays]]

LG: Field notes, entry 31, December 20th. After Bridget dropped a bombshell in my lap, November turned up nothing! I've been keeping myself entertained, going back over the contents of the box Jim sent, but the trail has officially gone cold. Old bears like me are supposed to start getting ready to hibernate by now. For now, I'm just pacing around my little cave.

[[SFX: radio tuning; Lou watches the televised verdict of Alger Hiss' conviction for perjury on Jan. 21, 1950; the phone rings, Lou picks up]]

LG: Hello?

JB: *(on phone)* It's me. Are you watching?

LG: Yeah. Wonder if Beck and Alger Hiss knew each other.

[[SFX: Lou turns the TV off]]

JB: [aughs] He would probably find the question a little rude.

LG: It's hard to believe it got this bad.

JB: I know. Nice to hear your voice, by the way. It's been a while. How have you been keeping?

LG: More stir crazy every day. Just waiting for the thaw.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

LG: Jackpot. This is entry 39, March 15th. Finally dug up something about a Margaret Elbourne, working for an independent scientific research group in the Midwest. What was it, (eading) "investigating neurological effects of

exposure to high levels of radiation." Best I've got. I'll give her a call tomorrow.

[[SFX: radio tuning; phone ringback]]

LG: Come on, lady, answer the damn–

[[SFX: Maggie answers]]

MAGGIE ELBOURNE (ME): *(on phone)* ...Hello?

LG: Hello, am I speaking with Dr. Margaret Elbourne? My name is Louis Gaines.

ME: Yes, what is this about, please?

LG: Well, ma'am, I'm a journalist. I'm doing a story on government contracts in the public sector, so I was calling in the hope you wouldn't mind chatting with me about your research.

ME: I did a lot of research for Dr. Carling, you'll have to be more specific. How did you get this number?

LG: I was interested in hearing about your radiation study. I couldn't get anyone to tell me anything further. I'm short of facts.

ME: Hardly surprising. What you want to know is classified, Mr. Gaines.

LG: I'm aware of that, but I have to hear the story. I'll be happy to give you my reasons in person, if you'd agree to meet me.

ME: ...You have my address?

LG: Yes, ma'am.

ME: There's a pay phone at the Turner's Gas around the corner from my house. Call ahead. I'll unlock the door for you.

[[SFX: Maggie hangs up; radio tuning]]

LG: Jesus Christ. You're serious.

ME: Mmm. Doctor Carling may have been the one pushing me, but I know it was that other woman, Roberts, who was telling him how things were going to be. I enjoyed seeing his reaction to her at first, but... God, what a chilly woman. The things she asked us to do for her–

LG: I'm sorry, this is still hard to get my head around. I don't know if I can believe it...

ME: I try not to, if that makes any sense. If think about it, that just makes it worse. Makes me worse, like the worst headache you can imagine. Like driving in the dark, through a blizzard, with the lights off.

[[SFX: static distortion; Pandora in her cage]]

ME: Little Pandora and I were the only ones to make it out of that study in one piece. I'm sure there are long-term side effects, but again, best not. That kind of technology is unspeakably dangerous.

LG: Christ, when I think about what someone could do with that kind of power, and with David in the middle? Doctor... They have to be stopped. This isn't what I went to war for.

ME: I agree with you, Mister Gaines, but what can we do?

LG: We?

ME: Well, yes. I can't just agree with you, then let you go on a suicide mission by yourself. Not a very Christian thing to do, although I don't know what help I can be.

LG: Thank you, Doctor. I think you've given me just what I need.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

LG: Field notes, entry 40. March 19th. I hardly know what to do with myself. Dr. Elbourne threw kerosene on the fire with that... stuff. It's hard to get a read on people capable of horrors like that, and the chess player in me worries about that kind of unpredictability. If Elbourne is on the level, these ODAR people are playing by rules that we have no concept of.

[[SFX: radio tuning; a record plays]]

LG: Entry 46. August 19th. Guess who decided to send a birthday card to his mother? Ruth Marian called me last night. She says it's the first time she's heard from him in a year. The return address was from a post office box in some little Colorado town. "Point-of-Exile?" Pretty odd name. He says in the letters that he found work in avionics for the government, bolting wings to fighter jets. Not a bad cover story, but I don't buy that he doesn't have ready access to a pay phone. But I've got a city, and a PO Box. That's something I can work with What is it the Brits say? "Steady on."

[[SFX: radio tuning; a record plays]]

LG: Field notes, entry 47, August 28th. Sent a letter to the post office box, express. Got a response today, but from who? Honestly, it could be anyone. Anyone but David. The handwriting is his, sure enough, but this all amounts to a fair impression of him, at best. I can smell a mistake here. They might not even know they're making it. Hmm. I have some calls to make.

[[SFX: radio tuning; post office; phone rings]]

CLERK: Point-of-Exile Post, Errol speaking.

LG: *(on phone)* Hello, sir? I was wondering if you could help me out with something.

CLERK: I'll sure try, fella, what can I do for you today?

LG: The thing is, a friend of mine started a new job out there in Colorado and, wouldn't you believe it, he up and leaves without telling me where I can reach him! All I could get from his supervisor was a box at your post office, but I need to speak to him about something more urgent than can be solved by post.

CLERK: Oh my, that is a pickle. You're sure it's out here? Point-of-Exile is what you might call a company town. You say you had a box number?

LG: Yes, it should be box ██, that's what his boss said. Acted like he was giving up a family secret, can you imagine?

CLERK: Ha! Well, that's bosses all over, isn't it? Never seem to– oh, goodness.

LG: Something the matter?

CLERK: Well, it says here that this box is for special government use. Need an "open says-me" just to look inside, and we're not to give out further information about it.

LG: I see... There's no contact number listed at all?

CLERK: I'm awfully sorry, sir, but I can't say anymore. More than my job's worth to break protocol like that, they're… well, you know how it is. If there's anything else I can do–

LG: No, thank you, I appreciate it. I'll let you get back to it.

CLERK: Not getting anyone in trouble, am–

[[SFX: Lou hangs up]]

CLERK: Huh. Well, how d'you like that?

[[SFX: Clerk hangs up phone; radio tuning; a record plays]]

LG: I just don't understand what we gain by all this waiting, June. We know where he is. We know where they are!

JB: *(on phone)* You know what we're dealing with! We risk everything by moving too soon, and we don't have the luxury of trying again.

LG: [sigh] I know, June, I know. I am aware of the facts! But I need to do something. You may have already lost someone, but David feels further away every day, so I don't accept laying down and waiting for a miracle!

JB: We're not laying down. Think like a soldier, Lou. If we poke the hornet's nest, we can't take that back. We can't give ourselves away. Step away for a bit, take in a show. Don't forget to live your own life. All right?

LG: Yeah. Yeah, all right. I'm sorry for snapping. Talk soon.

JB: Soon, promise. Chin up.

[[SFX: radio tuning; Lou snores; end of record skips; phone rings]]

LG: *(roggy)* 'Mullo? [lears throat] Hello?

OPERATOR: *(on phone)* Good morning sir, you have a collect call from Mexico, will you accept charges?

LG: What? Who in the hell... Yes, fine.

OPERATOR: Please hold.

[[SFX: Lou turns off the record player]]

PETRA (P): *(on phone)* Good morning, Mister Gaines. This is your wake up call.

LG: I can see that, it's four in the morning. Who am I speaking to? Who is this?

P: Someone who has been catching up on your progress since June.

LG: The hell? What in the hell are you talking about, how did you find me here?

P: I followed my nose, just like you.

LG: Who are you? Dammit, I want answers!

P: Easy, Mister Gaines. I'm a friend, I promise.

LG: My friends have names.

P: You can call me Petra. I just wanted to call and say, "hey, thanks." The doctor wasn't on my radar, she was a good find. I knew they had good reason to worry about you.

LG: And where is this information coming from? What's your role here?

P: I can't say just yet. This isn't how I wanted to do things, but you've had to play this fast and loose as it is. If I get too close too soon, things could spin out of our control.

LG: You talk about this like a game, why should your word mean anything to me?

P: Maybe so. Don't trust me, then. But trust June. She deserves it, if anybody does.

LG: Tell me something, friend. Did you work for them? Do they have something on you, too?

[[SFX: Petra hangs up; radio tuning]]

JB: *(on phone)* I heard you spoke to our mutual friend last night.

LG: Good lord, you too? I hope you told her to take a hike.

JB: You should cut her some slack. She seems like a young woman with a lot to think about, and her position isn't that different from ours. Didn't she tell you to trust me?

LG: Fine. Did you give any thought to my last letter?

JB: Lou, I already told you what happened back then. I don't know what I would do if I was even in the same room as her. In that situation, I don't know that I could trust myself.

LG: I don't know about you, June, but I've crossed every other name off my list. If we're going to have any chance at success, we need her. If what you told me is for real, then we need her.

JB: After what she made me do, how could I possibly...?

LG: Are you sure she's to blame? You know her better than I do. Either it was intentional, or there's something else going on, now, what's more likely?

JB: [sigh] Fine. If you can track her down, if you can make a compelling case–

LG: I'll do it, June. We're close.

JB: *(fondly)* You're a maniac. Best of luck.

[[SFX: June hangs up; radio tuning; Lou walks up a gravel path; the wind blows; Sally digs in her garden]]

LG: Good morning, ma'am. Those look like some prize-winners, if you don't mind me saying.

SALLY GRISSOM (SG): That's the idea. Fun fact: if you want to pursue a career in gardening, don't pick a converted mining town sixty-five-hundred feet above sea level. But with a little know-how and good ol' cussedness, I figured out a pretty slick soil aeration system.

LG: Very impressive, Doctor Grissom.

SG: It's DOCTOR Griss… Wait.

LG: Ma'am, I'm a journalist, I wanted to discuss your work during the war.

SG: What is it with you?! Huh? Jesus!

LG: I'm sorry?

SG: Not you. This! The universe! I was done with this shit, I was growing pumpkins! I was going to be the best pumpkineer who ever was! Do you even know why you're here? Really?

LG: The research that led me to you was extensive.

SG: Well, here's a bit of useful information you missed: you should quit. You shouldn't lose any more sleep over whatever this is, it's not worth it. Sorry to waste your time.

LG: With all due respect ma'am, you can't refund all the time I've spent on this. If I'm losing sleep, ODAR is stealing it from me. From June Barlowe. I've been trying to find a friend of mine for over a year, and it's ODAR keeping him in the dark. I saved him once, I made him my responsibility, and without him, I'm not left with much… I don't even know if he's still alive. Please, Doctor. We need your help.

[[SFX: Sally opens her gate]]

SG: Maybe you'd better come inside.

[[SFX: tape recorder stops]]

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ars PARADOXICA was created by Daniel Manning & Mischa Stanton.
Episode 19: Gumshoe features –

L. Jeffrey Moore (Lou Gaines)
Hannah Trobaugh (June Barlowe)
Rebekah Allen (Bridget Chambers)
Lauren Shippen (Maggie Elbourne)
Lia Peros (Petra)
Kristen DiMercurio (Sally Grissom)

James Oliva, Brock Bivens, Erin Bark (additional voices)
with special thanks to Isabel Atkinson

Original music by Mischa Stanton and by Eno Freedman-Brodmann. This episode also featured music by Jazz Street Trio.
ars PARADOXICA is brought to you by The Internet: Wherever books are sold.

26 25 05 | 18 24 13 22 21 | 22 02 02 | 08 05 10 11 20 | 22 18 23 15 01 16 25 20 13
WEATHER: hurricane

20: Hitchhiker

WRITTEN BY ELI BARRAZA
DIRECTED & SOUND DESIGN BY MISCHA STANTON

[[SFX: tape recorder starts; Victoria serves tea]]

VICTORIA (V): Alice, dear, may I ask you something of a personal nature?

JUNE BARLOWE (JB): Vicky, four years and you still ask permission?

V: I know, but you can be quite reserved about some things! The past is the past, and all that. You're about looking towards the future. But that's what I'm asking about.

JB: Go on.

V: I get the sense that you're not sticking around for much longer in Carlsbad. Lord knows, you've overhauled the perfume counter... But this was all just you biding time for something, isn't it?

JB: Oh Vicky, it's not like that. Carlsbad was good for a while but... I've been saving up and I think I need to move back to Illinois, where there's some real greenery. I'm tired of seeing the New Mexico Sun on my doorstep.

V: Look, you're a tough woman and if you think that you need to get out of here, well, I'll miss you but I support you. Promise to send me a postcard from every rest stop so I know that some hitchhiker didn't try to murder you on the highway?

JB: Please! As if I'd ever give a lift to a hitchhiker.

V: And, as a last request, Alice, could you... I feel a little silly saying this in case I'm wrong but, I was wondering, before you left... what's your real name?

JB: Vicky, I... it's June. June Barlowe.

[[SFX: radio tuning; a rural gas station; June buys a soda from a machine]]

BEN QUIGLEY (BQ): Excuse me, miss?

JB: Yes? Oh my god!

[[SFX: June flings her soda bottle at Ben]]

BQ: Whoa there! Nearly decked me!

JB: Quentin?!

BQ: Here, let me grab that for you... And the name's not Quentin. I'm Ben. Ben Quigley.

[[SFX: Ben returns the bottle to June]]

BQ: Apologies for startling you, ma'am. I was wondering, well hoping really, if you happened to be heading north eastward on 66? Most people around here are usually heading the other way. I'd pay for gas and maybe a hot meal for the favor?

JB: Well um, Give me a minute–

BQ: Sorry about that again. Didn't mean to scare.

JB: No no, it's fine, woke me up better than the coffee-flavored sludge they had at the motel. Where are you going? I'm headed all the way to Illinois.

BQ: Pretty far for a lady such as yourself.

JB: I get by fine.

BQ: I don't doubt it, with an arm like that. To be honest, I'm not too sure where I'm headed.

JB: Well Qu- Ben. Why don't you tell me about it in the car.

BQ: Thank you kindly, ma'am. Oh, I never caught your name?

JB: June Barlowe.

QB: Barlowe. That's a nice name.

[[SFX: They get into the car; radio tuning; as they drive]]

BQ: After I got back, I thought about what I wanted to do and it was one of those cheesy moments when I was stargazing and thought, "I'd like to go there next."

JB: Where? To space?

BQ: Yeah, space! Like, you ever read Jules Verne? Or see the Frenchman's picture about it? "La Voyage dans La Lune?" Now, I dunno about getting to the moon, but I'd at least like to get to space, you know?

JB: So what's a spaceman doing in my car then?

BQ: Figured I'd get to know the country, get to know the planet a bit better before I try leaving it. All these scientists and G-Men, I don't think they

spend enough time around the people and places that they're affecting, you know?

JB: Acutely.

BQ: And if I'm gonna help get America to space, then I want to get to know her a bit better. Brainiacs like me shouldn't stay in their ivory tower.

JB: Not many people think like that, Mr. Quigley.

BQ: And I think that's a right pity, Ms. Barlowe.

[[SFX: tape fast-forward; "Aura Lee" on the car radio]]

JB: Now that I'm done in Carlsbad, I thought I'd go back to where I grew up. I've got the beginnings of a... project in mind. It's late summer now but oh you'd love it in the fall, Ben, with all of the leaves and the air just feels... fresh. Nothing like the dead orange air of New Mexico.

[[SFX: "Will the Circle Be Unbroken" comes on the car radio]]

BQ: I love this song!

JB: I know!

BQ: You do?

JB: ...I mean, I know, it's a great song!

[[SFX: June turns the music up]]

BQ: Can't go wrong with the classics. Could you turn it down a little though? It's hard to talk over.

JB: I didn't realize you wanted to keep talking…

[[SFX: June turns the music down]]

BQ: You're an odd woman, Ms. Barlowe but I do enjoy talking to you.

JB: Please, call me June.

BQ: As you wish, June.

[[SFX: tape fast-forward]]

JB: I know The Invisible Man Returns isn't the best but oh it was so fun!

BQ: But did you see the Invisible Woman?

JB: How could I, if she's invisible?

BQ: Where have you been hiding a sense of humor?

JB: You seem to bring it out of me.

[[SFX: car is parked]]

BQ: I really hate to say it but I think this is my stop. Maybe we could grab another meal at Diamonds? I heard they rebuilt it just last year.

JB: I'd really like to but… I think I should continue on. Can't afford to get distracted and dawdle with such a long way to go.

BQ: Holding yourself accountable, June. I like that. If I'm to be honest, of all the people I've gotten to know so far, I'm happiest that I've gotten to know you.

[[SFX: Ben opens the door]]

JB: Ben, before you go, I'd like to... Well, if you're ever in the Chicagoland area, look me up, alright? I'd like to see you again, I mean I hope I'll see you again.

BQ: I hope so too, June.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

JB: Yes, Mother, I made it, safe and sound. You're sure you and Dad are going to be alright in the DC house?... Yes, of course I'll be over for the holidays... No, I haven't met a MAN, I just got here. Well that's not entirely accurate, I did meet someone... No no, he was veteran I gave a ride to, that's all. Yes I know how dangerous it is–Mother, please! I did give him my name and maybe I'll see him again and maybe I won't but that's none of your business for the time being! Tell dad I said hello.

[[SFX: June slams the receiver down]]

JB: Pull yourself together, June. Just because you met a man who looks like Quentin and acts like Quentin and now all you're thinking about is... no. God gave you a brain, he expects you to use it. Especially when the heart's all used up... Now. Where to begin.

[[SFX: radio tuning; phone ringback]]

HELEN PARTRIDGE (HP): *(on phone)* Hello?

JB: Is this Helen Partridge?

HP: Who's calling?

JB: My name is June, June Barlowe, from–

HP: Polvo, right, you. Why on earth are you calling me?

JB: ...I'm sorry, Helen. I-I just moved back to Chicago, well Evanston, really, and was hoping to reconnect with old friends, talk about–

HP: We weren't much friends, June. Our husbands worked together. We both went to the same cocktail parties. Not much else. And Los Angeles is a bit of a hike from Chicago.

JB: Look, I'm just trying to reconnect with everyone and it's been a trouble to find people.

HP: Trouble? You know as well as I do that's all you'll have if ODAR finds out you've been snooping around. My recommendation? Stop whatever you're thinking about doing. Now.

JB: But Helen I–

[[SFX: Helen hangs up; June slams the receiver]]

JB: Dammit!

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

PATTY FITZROY (PF): Here's your tea, June. Lemme check if George is still here. *(calls out)* George, darlin', June's here! George?! June Barlowe our very dear old friend is here! *(to June)* Hm, he musta left already to go teach his class. University of Chicago, you know a lotta ODAR folks went there!

JB: You don't say.

PF: Oh June, I was so happy when you called! we thought you dropped off the face of the earth after what happened to Quentin, ah, such a tragedy. But here you are, bright as ever and that perfume! I've been dabbling in aromas myself, figured I'd have some fun with my chemistry background.

JB: –That's fascinating! And how are the others doing? I spoke to Gertrude, Helen, and Jill so far but have had some trouble tracking down the rest of the old gang, especially that Esther Roberts.

PF: You know I have no idea where Esther went off to, disappeared when we all went our separate ways. You know, she was one of those Chicago gals, too! But it's the funniest thing, you know. Last week, there I was, talking to George about how no, I couldn't go to the faculty function tomorrow, the second episode of the Lone Ranger was gonna be on, when the phone rang. It was a reporter! Asking about ODAR people just like you–well not JUST like you but anyways here I am thinking cowboys and then this Mr. Gaines fella calls asking about science! Well, I couldn't tell him much because, well, you know how it is.

JB: A reporter? Do you by any chance still have his number?

PF: Sure! Took it down just to be polite, hold on, it was around here somewhere.. oh! Of course right under George's hat. I told him earlier he looks exactly like Clayton Moore in it but he called me a big fat liar and I told him just you wait, you'll see him on the broadcast tonight, identical!

[[SFX: radio tuning; June dials the phone]]

JB: C'mon June, just call him. Pump him for information. He's only a reporter, you've dealt with those types before. He's just a silly man who probably doesn't even know what he knows.

[[SFX: phone ringback; Lou answers; music plays in the background]]

LOU GAINES (LG): *(on phone)* Louis Gaines speaking.

JB: Hello? Mister Gaines? I hope this isn't a bad time, I know it's late. I'm calling from Evanston. My name is June Barlowe.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

RECEPTIONIST (R): Hello ma'am. Can I help you? You seem a little lost.

JB: Oh hello! I was just looking for an alumni directory, I wanted to reconnect with some old classmates.

R: I can certainly go and check in our records, what year was it that you graduated?

JB: Ah, well you see some of these... friends graduated a different year than me but I can't recall the exact year. Could you perhaps look them up by name? An Esther Roberts perhaps?

R: I'll see what I can do, ma'am.

[[SFX: The receptionist walks away]]

JB: Work with that man... Probably drop me the minute I tell him anything. Do it alone, like you've been. You can do this.

[[SFX: The receptionist returns]]

R: I don't have anything current listed for an Esther Roberts but we did recently do an alumni feature on a... Bridget Chambers, who graduated the same year. The photo of their class is on the wall over there. Ring a bell?

JB: Ah, there she is, right next to Esther actually! How funny. Yes, could I grab her information? She might know how to hunt down my dear ole Esther.

[[SFX: radio tuning; June returns home]]

JB: New York! I knew this wouldn't be convenient, but Jesus, it's like chipping away at a mountain! Okay, options. Call her.... Not ideal. Ask parents for a ticket.... Too many strings. I could always... Dammit June, if you're Alice down the rabbit hole, you may as well take someone else with you.

[[SFX: June dials; phone ringback; Lou answers, with music]]

LG: *(on phone)* Louis Gaines speaking.

JB: I've thought it over. We'll have to be careful, Mr. Gaines, you don't know what they can do.

[[SFX: radio tuning; a party]]

JB: I know it feels like we've hit a stone wall after Bridget in October but at least you haven't had to host dinner parties with the post-Polvo wives club!

LG: *(on phone)* They can't be all that bad.

JB: You've never sat next to Gertrude Klein on her third glass of wine... I used to be friends with these people, Lou. But now I've got this whole new perspective, listening and picking up any scrap of information I can get. But there's been nothing useful!

LG: We'll keep our noses to the ground June. Check the papers, see if anything's been tied up a little too neatly. We'll get 'em. Like you said. Any luck at your DC shindig?

JB: My mother's attempt at marrying me off to some middle aged bachelor again. I had to avoid a certain member of Paul Douglas's staff for several hours.

LG: Did you dig anything up?

JB: Unfortunately, not many were people in the mood to discuss government contracts and scientific exploits with a widowed woman over the holiday. Oh, listen, I've got to go. We'll catch up soon.

LG: Happy New Year, June.

JB: Happy New Year, Lou.

[[SFX: June hangs up; radio tuning]]

LG: *(on phone)* I've got a lead on a post office in Colorado.

JB: Do you think that's where they are?

LG: Maybe, but with a name like Point-of-Exile, it's oddly on the nose. I'll call you back with what I find out.

[[SFX: June hangs up; the phone rings]]

JB: Barlowe residence.

OPERATOR: *(on phone)* We have a collect call from Mexico, will you accept charges?

JB: Mexico? Who on earth?... yes I'll accept.

OPERATOR: Please hold.

[[SFX: lines connected]]

PETRA (P): *(on phone)* Ms. Barlowe. Can I call you June?

JB: Who is this?

P: I'm just an interested party, checking in on your progress in disrupting a certain government organization. I'd say my friends call me Petra but... I'm fresh out of friends. But I intend to help if you'll accept it.

JB: And what would make me trust a voice on the phone?

P: Quick on the uptake! I like that.

JB: I've been doing this for a while, Petra. These days I can smell them coming from fifty paces.

P: I've left the employ of our mutual friends recently and the skills I gained from them were attained at... a high cost. I think you'll take my meaning when I say that I've seen my future with them and it was not all that bright.

JB: I do take your meaning and I'm sorry for whatever happened to you, but who's to say that you aren't still in their employ?

P: If I was, they would have stopped you before you started. You're hitting dead ends, June, but you can still beat them! It's time you widened the circle.

JB: I'll think on it. Lou and I are partners and I'd like to discuss this... widening the circle.

P: He's next on my list to call. I'll let him know to trust your judgment. I already do.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

LG: *(on phone)* Well I don't know about you, June, but I've crossed every other name off my list. If we're going to have any chance at success, we need her. If what you told me is for real, then we need her.

JB: After what she made me do, how could I possibly–?

LG: Are you sure she's to blame? You know her better than I do. Either it was intentional, or there's something else going on, now, what's more likely?

JB: [sigh] Fine. If you can track her down, if you can make a compelling case–

LG: I'll do it, June. We're close.

JB: You're a maniac. Best of luck.

[[SFX: June hangs up]]

JB: Track down Sally Grissom, that high horse riding, garbage spewing, takes no action freak! I can't believe he wants to... she's the reason why I'm here in the first place!

[[SFX: phone rings; June picks up]]

JB: Barlowe residence, please don't tell me this is another call from Mexico, those rates are ridiculous!

BQ: *(on phone)* Mexico? Who have you been talking to in Mexico?

JB: Oh I beg your pardon, I thought... [clears throat] who may I ask is calling?

BQ: I know it's been over a year, June, but I was hoping you wouldn't forget me that easily.

JB: ...Ben?

BQ: Oh thank god, I really had to strike up the courage to look you up and then as the phone was ringing, I realized that you might not remember me and for a moment there you didn't but you do! ...I should start over. Hello, it's Ben Quigley, the man who hitched a ride with you last year. Also the man who would like to see you maybe for dinner?

JB: Ah, you've caught me at an interesting time, Ben.

BQ: Oh. I see. Well then, I'm sorry to have bothered you, Ms. Barlowe. Perhaps another time, have a nice day–

JB: I can cook dinner! Financially, going out is a bit extravagant but I can cook... if you like.

BQ: You aren't afraid of having some man over to your home?

JB: [laughs] Ben Quigley, if you were going to do something drastic to me, you had an entire road trip to do it! No, I haven't had a guest over that I actually liked in ages, so it's no problem, really. Friday at 7 work?

BQ: It works perfectly.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

JB: Ben, you are downright dastardly!

BQ: What? I'd gone for months surrounded by these serious gray faces, pretending I too was a serious gray faced man, and I couldn't take it anymore! I couldn't tell if he was amused at my prank or happy that he finally had a reason to transfer me to another department. Either way, I'm happy to be done with neutrinos. Not really my thing as it turns--

[[SFX: doorbell]]

JB: What on earth? Just a moment Ben, probably just a salesman... or some girl scouts.

BQ: At this hour?

[[SFX: June opens the door]]

P: Hello, June. Mind if I come in? Been traveling nonstop from Mexico!

JB: Pet... Petr–

P: Petrified to meet me? Excellent! Exactly the effect I was looking for. Sneaking up on people, kind of my thing these days. Sorry it had to be you, Lou is way higher up on ODAR's list of people to keep an eye on so I didn't want to risk showing up in Delaware. How are you, June?

BQ: Oh, it is a girl scout.

P: I'm not a Girl Scout. Yet another thing I've missed out on. Anyways, my name is Petra and oh my God, you're Quentin Barlowe!

BQ: Ah, what?

JB: Ksh, shush shhhh shhh no, Petra, this is my friend Mr. Quigley. Ben Quigley.

BQ: Quentin... you kept calling me that during the road trip.

JB: What? No I didn't.

BQ: And this young lady just said Quentin Barlowe, hang on, what's going on here?

[[SFX: static distortion]]

P: June, this is Quentin, I've seen pictures of the original timepiece team. When we agreed to get the gang together, I didn't realize... Wasn't he was

dead though? Yeah, he was the reason why ODAR never allowed weapons near the timepiece.

[[SFX: static distortion recedes]]

BQ: Timepiece? ODAR? June, who is this young woman?

P: You haven't told him?!? Wait, how does he not know? Oh my God, wait, your husband was a time traveler, and you didn't even know it, and now you're trying to hide that from the earlier version of him so he doesn't end up going back and dying all over again??... Wowza, maybe I shouldn't have said all of those things out loud. I've gotten way too used to talking to myself.

BQ: June, want me to call the police? This woman isn't making any sense, I think she might be disturbed.

JB: I...I need to show you something, Ben.

P: This is all happening very fast isn't it? Try living backwards for a while– about five years a year, now that is living fast! It's really nice to be able to say these things out loud without ODAR eavesdropping on very single phone call, you know. And you're walking away, okay I will follow and close the door behind me.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

JB: I've asked Petra to stay in the dining room while I explain things. At least the things about us.

BQ: Please, just tell me whatever you mean to tell me.

JB: The reason why I keep calling you Quentin is that... I was once married to a man by the name of Quentin Barlowe.

[[SFX: June opens a photo album]]

JB: We met in 1943, married not long after. Never took to a person so quickly, really. We were relocated to Polvo so fast we didn't even have to time to get our own house together. Quentin worked on a government project, a machine that can move backwards in time. They called it the Timepiece. Quentin was brilliant, and they saw that and they used it. And then... the man that was my husband died. Murdered. By a bullet that was fired the week after he died.

BQ: I'll admit, June. That man bears a striking resemblance but–

JB: I know your favorite song! I know that you hate strawberries and that you used to cut out your favorite Krazy Kat strips and use them as bookmarks! I do believe, even if I don't want to, that you are that man in the photo. And I am absolutely terrified that if they killed you once, they'll do it again.

BQ: Alright, let's say I believe you. How does that young lady out there figure into all of this?

JB: She's a... friend. After you, after Quentin died I had to lay low for a while but this past year I've been looking into ODAR, looking into how to stop them from hurting anyone else. She's helped spur the investigation along. And there's a man, Lou Gaines, I've been working with him this whole time. I'm so sorry, this is a lot to drop on a person all at once.

BQ: Yes, telling a person that not only is time travel possible but that they're a time traveller, oh wait, no, not yet, later, also that they have a wife who was so upset by their death–

JB: Well you're technically not dead yet–

BQ: Right, the death that hasn't happened, caused said wife to go on a multi-year crusade to bring down the mysterious government organization responsible for that death! That, June, is a lot to drop on person! What does ODAR even stand for anyway?

JB: Office of Developed Anomalous Resources.

BQ: Of course it does.

JB: There's no easy way to do this. It's a bit all or nothing.

BQ: So I've gathered. Are you a time traveler too?

JB: Ha! Good gracious no. I won't go within a 10 mile radius of that infernal thing if I don't have to. Petra, on the other hand, I have a feeling she's used it quite a bit.

BQ: Well, let's go and find out.

JB: You're not... running for the hills?

BQ: Look, either you're two of the most interesting lunatics I've ever met, or you're right and we're dealing with time travel. I said I wanted to be involved with the new frontier, right? Well this is it. Plus, if you are right, I'd really rather not die in 1945. Let's go out and talk to this Petra.

[[SFX: radio tuning; June and Petra do the dishes]]

P: That was a fun conversation.

JB: You seem to be a part of a lot of those.

P: Keep an eye on him, June. I'm not saying that he's a turncoat or will be. I'm talking medically. Pay attention to his speech patterns. If he coughs. If he gets confused about the order things happen...

JB: Do you think he might have, what did you call it, Butterfly Syndrome?

P: I'm not sure if there's an effect on people who have yet to travel but the brain really doesn't take well to paradoxes.

JB: Yours did.

P: And I paid an impossible price for it. At least you got him back, June. I'm never going to see them again.

JB: You know, sometimes you sound so very young and other times you sound older than I am.

P: Yeah, well that's pretty much how I feel all of the time.

[[SFX: more dishes]]

P: So, do you really think that Lou can convince Sally Grissom to help us?

[[SFX: June drops a plate; she collects the pieces]]

P: Oh sorry, sore subject. We only ever heard all the good stuff about her. ODAR propaganda at it again.

JB: Yes, well she brought them the Timepiece on a silver platter.

P: Though, June, I mean... I know you went through hell but you know that Sally hasn't exactly had an easy time of it herself, right? I'm not excusing anything she's done but... just don't throttle her if she shows, okay? ODAR screws everyone over equally.

JB: Not equally.

P: Point taken. Okay, new topic: what do you think of using code names when we get the gang together? I was thinking I could be Strider or OOH! Mountain Shroud!

[[SFX: radio tuning; teletypes and a radio scanner]]

JB: Petra, when I said that you could use the guest room, I didn't mean for you to set up your own war room–

P: There's someone pacing outside your house. She looks like she might be talking to herself.

JB: Oh god. I'll get it, you stay here.

P: And now she's walking up the walkway... no, no, she's turning around... wait she's coming back again, nevermind she's changed her mind. You'd think she'd get dizzy! Oh, and now for the final approach... oh my God it's actually her!

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

SG: So… No mushroom canapés I see.

[[SFX: June sets her cup down a little too hard; Petra enters]]

P: Lou called earlier, said the others should be arriving in a few days.

SG: Others! Yes, awesome other people with whom I may interact, we can all interact! Draw up plans, take down ODAR…. and, all that jazz….

[[SFX: silence; Sally coughs]]

P: Butterfly Syndrome?

SG: What? Oh, no. Just feeling really weird… You know June, I didn't think we'd, you know, hug or anything but I figured that words would, um, be exchanged and you would bring me up to speed on everything, and this terrible knot in my stomach would untie itself, and I could stop feeling like I was gonna throw up god damnit I really have the worst reversaries, girl cannot catch a break–

JB: You haven't apologised.

SG: I'm sorry.

JB: Excuse me?

SG: I'm sorry. Look, June, I have spent a lot of time feeling guilty over my role in ODAR and the Timepiece and ruining people's lives because there is so much more that's happened that you have no idea about. I was practically Miss Havisham level not leaving my house for a while. So yeah, I am sorry. I didn't mean for any of this to happen. But I'm not here for a pity party. I'm not here to get yelled at. I'm here to figure out how to fix this. I have an idea that might work! We tried it once before but then, Nikhil... the man who I was working with. They got him before we could put it into motion.

P: Nikhil? N-Nikhil Sharma?

SG: Yeah, you know him?

P: I... um... I'm going to make another cup of coffee. Does anyone want some? No, okay cool.

[[SFX: Petra exits]]

JB: I'm sorry. About your friend. This... Nikhil.

SG: Thank you.

JB: Let me be clear with you. I do not like you. My world is lesser with you in it and nothing you can say or do will ever change that. I know that we need you and you need us if we are to pull this off. But we will never be "pals." Clear?

SG: Crystal.

JB: Good. There are also some other things that we need to discuss.

SG: I know, first we have to figure out how to break into ODAR, actually we might be able to circumvent that if we got our hands on our own Rainbow generator or maybe built one ourselves but dammit they probably have those papers under lock key and ODAR time agent bullshit but what if, hm, I wonder what Victor Lambert is up to these days, probably still behind bars after that Christmas fiasco in Polvo but it might be easier to break him out rather than getting the–

JB: Sally.

[[SFX: knock on door]]

JB: Ah, there he is.

SG: I thought Petra said that the others weren't arriving for a few days.

JB: Oh, she meant Lou and his people. No, this is someone... well I can't fully explain it but you'll recognize him.

[[SFX: June opens the door]]

JB: Ben, this is Sally Grissom. Sally, meet Ben Quigley.

BQ: It's a pleasure to meet you Ms. Grissom.

SG: I... How... It's Dr. Grissom.

[[SFX: tape recorder stops]]

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ars PARADOXICA was created by Daniel Manning & Mischa Stanton.
Episode 20: Hitchhiker features –

Hannah Trobaugh (June Barlowe)
Lee Satterwhite (Quentin Barlowe/Ben Quigley)
Susanna Kavee (Helen Partridge)
L. Jeffrey Moore (Lou Gaines)
Lia Peros (Petra)
Kristen DiMercurio (Sally Grissom)

Lily Richards, Eli Barraza, Erin Bark, Aze Gates (additional voices)
with special thanks to Isabel Atkinson

Original music by Mischa Stanton and by Eno Freedman-Brodmann.
ars PARADOXICA is brought to you by The Internet: Thanks, Obama.

26 19 13 11 | 22 23 25 26 | 05 23 | 06 07 05 25 17 | 05 16
17 24 14 16 | 07 13 23 08 04 | 05 05 | 07 23 20
WEATHER: tornado

21: Jailbreak

WRITTEN BY DANIEL MANNING
DIRECTED & SOUND DESIGN BY MISCHA STANTON

[[SFX: tape recorder starts]]

SALLY GRISSOM (SG): Diary of Sally Grissom, November 1st, 1950. So! Since the last time I checked in, I've started working with a group of radicals looking to subvert a top secret division of the United States government. Y'know. In case you needed a verbal confession when we all get put on trial for treason. Classic me, right?

So there's Lou Gaines, a reporter or teacher or something who got burned by ODAR, and Bridget Chambers, some super-librarian who knows Roberts I think, and there's Maggie Elbourne and her best friend/pet mouse Pandora, and there's a kid here who I think was born in the 90s somehow and June Barlowe is here and she still hates me and also, hey, Quentin Barlowe is alive. Only he's not Quentin, I guess he's Ben Quigley now... or was before, because he's younger than the one I knew, wch means Barlowe was from the future. Was he an ODAR spy? An ODAR spy spying on ODAR? That is some heavy espionage shit.

Unlike that nonsense, our plan is pretty simple: if we build a second anchor point, like the one Nikhil Sharma was planning, then we can erode ODAR's control of spacetime. Another anchor point disrupts their causal models to the point that... well, there's a lot of math, and that's, like, normally my whole thing, but I spent two years making a working model of this clown-shoes system with just one gaping wound in spacetime, and without me to help them I have a feeling a second one ight trip them up a bit.

Of course, we need a Rainbow generator. and I'm not confident we could build one of those safely. The one in Point-of-Exile still has a big ol' "NO SALLIES ALLOWED" sticker slapped on it from the last time I tried to pull this stunt. So Gaines and Chambers are looking for the original minds behind it, Ivan Maraczek and Victor Lambert, but their probe hasn't turned up much of anything. Jeez, my kingdom for a blueprint.

It's times like this I wish I could call Partridge, but we haven't really talked since we did those boundary tests. Well, I guess if this works–

[[SFX: door opens]]

MAGGIE ELBOURNE (ME): I'm sorry, Sally? Petra says she needs to speak with us.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

PETRA (OP): Hey everyone! Thanks for coming, I'm just gonna get right to it. So you know how because of the way I grew up I'm kinda "special?"

SG: Sure, you're a time weirdo.

OP: ...Right, time weirdo. So, I may have done something, and it's not my fault and it's kinda my fault but I didn't really do it.

JUNE BARLOWE (JB): Petra, whatever it is you can tell us. We're all in this together now.

OP: Okay... Hey! You can come out!

[[SFX: door opens; Future Petra enters]]

FUTURE PETRA (FP): Ta-da!

OP: Look ma, two Petras!

LOU GAINES (LG): What in the.../
SG: That's not good./
ME: What in Heaven's name do you think you're doing!/
BEN QUIGLEY (BQ): Okay, that's pretty nifty.

OP: Don't be mad! She's okay!

FP: Yeah yeah! We're okay! We can do this.

OP: We're special.

FP: We're unique.

OP/FP: One of a kind!

BQ: ...Third base!

OP: She showed up last night.

FP: In the coming weeks, you will be tested in ways you never have before. You're getting thrown into the deep end, and you're gonna need my help. I had a Petra who trained me for this, and she was trained by a Petra before her, and she was trained by a Petra before her, part of a legacy stretching... well, three weeks, but it's a lot of different timelines. And I have come to continue the chain.

BRIDGET CHAMBERS (BC): Hi! Excuse me, Bridget here, still new to the time travel business... What?

LG: You'll have to forgive those of us without extensive time travel operative training, and explain it a little slower.

FP: Okay, so, Petra goes and does the thing right? Some... other Petra. And that mission goes sideways, so she goes back in time and helps out the Petra that's already there, and trains that new Petra, who goes back in time when hat mission goes sideways. Again and again, forever and ever, until the plan succeeds. Which is hopefully this time.

SG: How does that even work?

FP: Listen: I've got the answers from the future that you need. Do you want them, or not?

SG: ine.

JB: It's not just your decision, Sally. Does anyone object to hearing what she has to say?

ME: I object purely on a medical level! Just by being here Petra, I'd say you've put us all at significant risk of paradox sickness–

OP/FP: –Butterfly Syndrome.

ME: [sigh] Yes, fine. That said, everything I know suggests we should all be lying on the floor convulsing in existential horror. And yet... here we are.

BC: Given the nature of what we're up against and the potential lessons we can learn... I think hearing her out is the obvious answer here. We need all the information we can get our hands on.

ME: [sigh] I suppose that makes sense.

LG: June, you're good with this?

JB: Well, I mean, Petra's gotten us this far. It'd be a shame to waste two of her.

FP: Perfect! Alright. If you want to set up another anchor point, you guys need to break Victor Lambert out of prison.

JB: Lambert? Wouldn't take him for the criminal type.

SG: He assaulted Jack Wyatt with a pipe a few years ago. Almost killed him.

FP: And since Polvo was already on its last legs, they brushed him under the carpet, like they did with June. But then ODAR found him selling RAINBOW technology to General Electric! So they locked him in a cell and threw away the key.

JB: Can't we just use the anchor point Sally is building?

SG: I've hit a wall. I don't know enough about it to engineer something that's not going to mess up spacetime even worse.

BQ: But isn’t messing up spacetime exactly what we’ve been working on?

SG: Well, yes, but mess it up without all life as you know it stopping instantaneously and every molecule in your body exploding at the speed of light.

OP: Isn’t that a line from Ghostbu-?

SG: -It’ll be total protonic reversal. I’m sorry, we just can’t do this work alone. I may be a genius but even I don't know everything.

JB: First time you've ever said that out loud?

SG: Haha, cool... grade-A zinger, June{!} The point is, we need to get Victor Lambert.

FP: Yeah, I just told you that.

SG: I know, but you can't just say “because I'm from the future and I told you so-”

FP: I mean, that's kinda why I'm here-

LG: -Okay people! Victor Lambert jailbreak it is.

BQ: Oh joy. Now I get to die twice.

FP: You’ve died a lot more than that, bucko.

JB: Can we not talk about my husband dying please?

BQ: So I’m your husband now?

JB: ...Yes, well, I've decided to ignore the whole “till death do us part” bit.

BQ: I haven’t actually said that bit yet-

ME: [laughs]

LG: So Petra, what’s our next step?

FP: Well, we’re gonna need a key.

SG: Oh! I can pick locks!

FP: It’s not that kind of key.

SG: Aww.

FP: The locks in their prison are controlled by radio. You transmit the right code to the computer, the door unlocks.

ME: Radios. Talking to computers. What'll they think of next?

SG: [laughs]

BQ: Then it's easy. We intercept the signal, decode it, and then transmit our own version of the code when we need it.

FP: Listen, we only broke the Enigma code with a pretty beefy cryptanalysis by the greatest minds of a generation! The stuff that ODAR uses is so advanced, it was completely unbreakable, even when I was growing up.

OP: Sally, you didn't happen to supply ODAR with encryption technology from "20XX", did you?

SG: You mean 20[redacted]? No, I didn't.

FP: They took the design from the encryption chip on your cell phone.

SG: UGH! Fucking time travel!

BQ: What's a cell phone?

FP: Actually, I think an iteration of your phone manages the whole network now–

SG: I smashed it and buried it! I thought I was rid of that thing once and for all.

BQ: No, really, what's a cell phone?

OP: Ohmigod, so aggravating is it talking to these people, right Sally?

SG: You have no idea what it's like. Actually... I guess you kinda do.

JB: Please, ladies, continue! I never get tired of hearing about how we're all rubes trapped in the past.

SG: You are trapped in the past!

LG: June! Dr. Grissom, we've got better things to do than watch you two duke it out. Now, Petra–

OP: –Future Petra.

FP: Does that make you Past Petra?

LG: Petra–

OP: That just makes me Petra. I'm the Original.

LG: If you could–

FP: Well, from my point of view, you're the duplicate–

LG: Enough! Whichever one of you nows what we're doing here, would you kindly tell us how to beat the locks?!

FP: Well, the passcode is refreshed every 12 hours.

ME: So we can't just steal one now.

BC: Petra, why don't we use the code your team had?

FP: Because all the computers are controlled through the Blackroom, and they use some sort of quantum uncertainty nonsense to make sure the key is always different. And none of the guards' passcodes work at night. So unless we want to do this in broad daylight, there's only one passcode we can use.

SG: Please don't say Chet Whickman.

FP: It's Chet Whickman's.

SG: Come on, really??

BC: So not only are we breaking a prisoner out of Colorado Alcatraz, but we need to break into the Boss's office to do it. Brilliant! We're up shit creek!

FP: Good thing I brought a paddle. In exactly 21 days... well, 20 days, 7 hours, aaaaaand 36 minutes, the guard rotation of ODAR HQ and their prison matches up, and we've got a 20 minute window to get Whickman's code and break Lambert out.

ME: But there's no way we could do all of that in 20 minutes!

FP: Not unless we divide and conquer. Half of us infiltrate ODAR HQ, get the code, then radio it to the half of us at the prison. Whickman won't be there, everyone else will be asleep. You guys, this is our chance.

LG: You've sold me. What do we need?

FP: Two vans, some rope, surplus walkie talkies for all of us, and June: you know Sue Perkins, right?

JB: Uh, yeah. Sure. Runs a print shop with her husband.

FP: Get in touch with her. We need her to fake ODAR identification. You can use Sally's old card as a model. Tell Sue that it's important for stopping the Communists and she'll basically do whatever you tell her.

JB: How are you so sure?

FP: Because I'm from the future and I told you so.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

LG: Alright, we leave in an hour. This is it, folks. Make peace with your god, call your mother, do what you need to do. Any questions before we go?

ME: I… I forgot which guard tower we're targeting. Was it this one?

LG: It's the southeastern tower. Ben is going to be posted here...

OP: Hey, Petra, can I talk to you for a second?

FP: Oh, um, sure.

[[SFX: the Petras move to another room]]

FP: What is it, Petra?

OP: Listen... You've got to tell me what happened. In your timeline.

FP: There's an ancient legacy of Petras–

OP: No there isn't. Come on, I know when I'm lying.

FP: ...No, there isn't.

OP: You weren't visited by a version of us?

FP: I was. That part was real. The Petra before me, she was... a badass. I wasn't totally lying. There was a mission, it just... didn't go any farther than her. But she had done it all. She lived through all this again and again, learning, training, adapting. She had these three weeks down to a cience. You could turn on the radio and she could tell you what's playing before it warmed up. She'd stop you in the middle of an argument and play your part for you. This was, like, her Groundhog Day or something. You thought we were good... She was the best of us.

OP: ...But she's not here.

FP: [sigh] I knew something was wrong when they didn't make it back from the prison. By the time I got there, part of her insides were... outside. Lambert was dead. So I grabbed this Timepiece out of the back of the truck, and came back to now. And she's gone.

OP: Petra... I'm so sorry.

FP: It's your loss as much as it is mine. You don't get a mentor.

OP: I have you.

FP: It's not the same, and you know it! All that knowledge, all that experience, all that... me. Us. Gone, forever.

OP: She's not gone. She lives in you. In us. We're all just the same person. Which reminds me: if we pull this off tonight, what happens to me and you and us?

FP: I don't know. If it's done correctly, we get Lambert, convince him to build an anchor, fix it like Nikhil wanted, do the thing. And then there's no reason for either of us to go back again.

OP: "Two Petras, both alike in dignity in fair Point-of-Exile."

FP: [laughs] Here's what I think we should do: we each bring a recorder, and then no matter what happens, we'll both know what happened.

OP: We'll sync up. I like that. I can work with that.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

OP: Alright, it's going. I'll see you later, Future Petra. Hopefully. I love you.

SG: You like audio diaries, huh?

OP: Only because of you. Your recordings from those first few years in Polvo, they're... legendary.

SG: You've heard them?

OP: Only tales. I think Liam snuck a transcript of one once. You were complaining that nobody liked you in town.

SG: Despite loving the idea that you and your time-buddies used to hang on my every word, maybe you can understand that you having read my diary is a little messed up.

OP: They've got every recording you've ever made, Sally. Probably a few you haven't.

SG: ...Huh.

BC: They're gonna catch us, I'm sure…

[[SFX: car slows; June rolls down the window]]

GUARD 1: Wow-ee! There sure are a lot of you misses here tonight. You sure you're in the right place?

JB: Yes, we're sure. Miss Roberts called us into work late.

G1: Did she, now? I'm gonna have to see your IDs–

SG: Hey Nick!

G1: Sally! I mean, Dr. Grissom. I didn't know you were working with us again.

SG: Sure am! Just got my new ID last week.

JB: Alright, girls, pass me your identification.

[[SFX: they hand their IDs forward]]

JB: Here you go.

G1: Alright, thank you, looks good, looks good... Hmm. Miss, this can't be your ID.

OP: What?

G1: This can't be yours. It says here you were born in 1927.

OP: I mean, I was! That's my birthday, April 28, 1927.

G1: If you're 24 years old, then how come you don't look a day over 19?

OP: I... uh... I don't know, everybody always tells me that I look super young, so I, uh...

G1: [chuckles] Don't worry about it, Miss Bradbury. Just rattling your cage. Drive on through, ladies.

[[SFX: June rolls up the window and drives on]]

SG: How old re you, anyway?

OP: I don't want to talk about it...

SG: It's because you don't know, is it?

OP: Cool, you got me! I'm the weird girl who doesn't have a birthday. Let me put it this way, I'm older than every other kid ODAR ever kidnapped, okay? You happy?

SG: ...Sorry.

OP: It's... whatever.

[[SFX: June parks the car; all exit]]

BC: How much time do we have?

OP: It's 11:43. We've got 17 minutes before the door codes refresh.

BC: And we're just gonna walk in and steal from the desk of the director of ODAR?

OP: As long as you don't get captured or killed, that is. You've got the walkie, June?

JB: Sure do. Ben, you read me?

BQ: *(on radio)* Loud and clear, honey. Over.

JB: Oh, right, we're supposed to say over. Over.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

FP: Hey Original Petra, it's me. We just got here. Uhh, I'm just gonna let this thing run. If I don't see you again, you know, for whatever reason, carry on the legacy. Know that I love you, and know that you're doing the right thing. I'm pretty sure.

LG: (Alright, set your watches.) We've got 25 minutes, in and out. No one stops for anything.

BQ: Are we sure I have to stay behind?

ME: We need someone to get us out.

BQ: Okay, I guess.

LG: You ready? Okay. Go! Go! Go!

[[SFX: Future Petra runs through a hole in the fence and down toward the prison; radio tuning]]

SG: This is so eerie. Did you ever sneak into your high school after hours?

OP: I never went to high school.

SG: Right. I'm sorry about all of this... what they did to you.

OP: It's not your fault, even though it kind of is.

[[SFX: Sally drops her pen]]

SG: I appreciate that.

GUARD 2: *(from afar)* Excuse me, miss?

SG: *(whispers)* Keep your head down. Walk faster.

[[SFX: they pick up the pace]]

G2: Miss?

SG: When you round the next corner, there'll be an office on your right three steps ahead, duck in there.

BC: Okay?

G2: Excuse me, miss?

OP: Go go go!

[[SFX: Sally, Petra, and Bridget round the corner; Sally and Bridget duck into offices; Original Petra's door is locked]]

G2: Miss!

[[SFX: Guard 2 approaches]]

G2: Miss.

OP: Yes?

G2: You dropped your pen.

OP: ...Oh! Thank you so much.

G2: No problem. Have a good night.

OP: You too!

[[SFX: Sally and Bridget emerge]]

OP: It was your pen.

SG: ...Sorry about that.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

LG: Alright, Petra, Maggie. We need that searchlight off or we're dead.

ME: You start climbing the tower. Knock on the railing once you're up. Then I'll cut the power.

[[SFX: Future Petra sneaks up the guard tower; "Clair de Lune" plays on the radio; Petra knocks on the tower, hops the railing into the tower room; the searchlight powers off; Petra strikes the chair out from under the guard; he comes to, draws his weapon; Petra kicks it away; they struggle; Petra slams the guard's head into a desk; Petra lifts the guard into a chair, gags and binds him]]

GUARD 3: [muffled shouting]

FP: Oops! Sorry about that. Not about the gag. I didn't mean for your head to hit the desk that hard.

G3: [muffled shouting]

FP: There there. Don't worry! This'll all be over soon. Think of it like this! You get a break from work, and you'll probably get a–little to the left? THERE we go–

G3: [muffled sobbing]

FP: You'll probably get a few days off or something, right?

G3: [muffled shouting]

FP: Of course I can't let you go. We've got a job to do. Relax, okay? Trust me, It's got nothing to do with you.

ME: *(on radio)* You done up there?

FP: Yeah, I got him. He's not going anywhere any time soon.

ME: *(on radio)* Oh my word, did you... did you kill him?

FP: What? No! No, he's fine. Just bound and gagged. I roughed him up a little, but he's gonna be fine, isn't that right, ... Barry?

G3: [muffled shouting]

BQ: *(on radio)* You guys are weird. Over.

LG: *(on radio)* We can't enter the main facility without a guard passcode. What have you got, Petra?

FP: Um… 52 84 91.

LG: *(on radio)* … 8… 4… 9…

FP: Hurry up! Ugh, why couldn't ODAR invent touch-tone too?

LG: *(on radio)* ...1.

[[SFX: over the radio, the prison door unlocks]]

LG: *(on radio)* Alright, Maggie and I are moving in. Ben, what's Red team's status?

[[SFX: static on walkie]]

LG: *(on radio)* I said Ben, what's their status?

[[SFX: static on walkie]]

FP: Ben!

BQ: *(on radio)* What is it?

FP: What's the other team doing?

BQ: *(on radio)* They're all okay. I think there was something about a pen?

FP: Lou, Red team is good, but Ben can't hear you and you can't hear him.

ME: *(on radio)* Shit.

FP: It's fine, I can just relay the numbers to you.

[[SFX: Lou's radio loses signal]]

LG: *(on radio)* That's good thinking, Petra. We're pressi...urther...ell block.

FP: What's that?

LG: *(on radio)* I said...etting clo...Lambert.

FP: You're breaking up!

LG: *(on radio)* What?

BQ: *(on radio)* If they go any deeper, they won't be able to hear you. Hold on… I have an idea. Petra, tell them to head to the gymnasium. You need to run down and reconnect that spotlight.

FP: Okay.

[[SFX: Petra runs down the guard tower]]

FP: Lou! Lou! You need to go to the gymnasium!

LG: *(on radio)* ...who?

FP: The gymnasium! Gymnasium!

LG: *(on radio)* ...ymnasium?

FP: Yes! Yes! Go there.

[[SFX: Petra reconnects the power; runs back up]]

FP: Hey there, Barry. How you feeling?

G3: [muffled grumbling]

FP: So why did I need to turn that back on?

BQ: *(on radio)* The gymnasium has glass skylights. How's your morse code?

FP: Decent, but don't ask for semaphore. Do you have the numbers yet?

BQ: *(on radio)* Almost. Get the spotlight ready.

[[SFX: radio tuning; lockpicking]]

OP: How much longer on this lock?

SG: If you could just be patient for like, one minute.

OP: We don't have one minute! We have six. Total.

SG: Lockpicking is hard, okay?–

BC: Shh! People are coming.

[[SFX: Esther and an aide walk by]]

ESTHER ROBERTS: Well I'm thinking, that we totally scrap the coolant system and instead siphon the excess heat so we can utilize it to spool up the turbine quicker...

BC: Oh, Ettie...

SG: She visited you in New York, didn't she?

BC: Yeah, she did. But Lou caught hold of me a few days before. Warned me, you could say? But it didn't soften the blow.

SG: You two used to be together, didn't you?

BC: I... yes.

SG: You're the ex.

BC: If I'm the ex, what does that make you?

SG: A friend. As much as Roberts can have.

BC: Yes, that sounds about right.

[[SFX: the door unlocks]]

SG: We're in.

BC: So this is where he works.

OP: I expected more, somehow.

SG: What were you looking for?

OP: A wall-sized world map covered in blinking lights. Maybe a wheelchair-bound crypto-fascist.

SG: [laugh] You know what? I wouldn't be surprised.

[[SFX: teletype starts up]]

BC: Here we go. Ben, you ready?

BQ: *(on radio)* Tell me.

[[SFX radio tuning; Future Petra tilts the spotlight]]

FP: Ready.

BQ: 4, 8, 1, 5, 1, 6

[[SFX: Petra flips the shutter open and closed in Morse code]]

FP: I did it.

BQ: *(on radio)* Do you think they got it?

FP: All we can do now is wait.

[[SFX: tape fast-forward; a prison door buzzer in the distance]]

FP: I see them!

BQ: *(on radio)* Do they have Lambert?

FP: Looks like it!

BQ: *(on radio)* Get on back to the van and we're home free!!

[[SFX: tape fast-forward; in the van]]

SG: *(on radio)* And then the towers, or "lls," if you catch my drift, carry Alice's voice traffic, and then the system sends it to the appropriate tower elsewhere, where the signal is picked up by Bob's phone.

BQ: Makes sense.

SG: *(on radio)* But we mostly used it for sending, like, telegraphs… Alright, we're pulling up to the meeting spot.

BQ: See you soon.

SG: *(on radio)* Later.

LG: How you doing back there, Victor?

VICTOR LAMBERT (VL): Peachy-keen! Who the hell are you people?

FP: [giggles] Petra! We did the thing! We got the guy!

BQ: Hey, we're here. Are the lights supposed to be off?

FP: Maybe they're not back yet?

ME: Well I believe that's their van, isn't it?

LG: I've got a bad feeling about this.

VL: [cackles]

FP: What's so funny?

VL: It's just you're walking into a trap, that's all.

ME: Do you know something we don't, Mr. Lambert?

VL: I've just got perspective. ODAR, they've got your number. They've got all our numbers.

FP: When did you become a Bond villain? Was it when you got that scar?

VL: You sound like Sally Grissom.

FP: ...thank you?

VL: You have no idea who you people are dealing with.

LG: Save it. Let's go.

[[SFX: van pulls up, shuts off; the party exits, walks up to the safehouse; Ben unlocks the door; the party enters]]

BQ: June? You there?

[[SFX: a lamp turns on]]

SG: Hey guys...

CHET WHICKMAN (CW): Evening, everyone.

[[SFX: gun hammer clicks]]

LG: Goddammit.

VL: What did I tell you?

CW: So we've added the Commie traitor, the rat queen, Quentin Barlowe back from the dead, and... another Petra? I thought we had lost you and now we've got a pair! It's like Christmas come early.

SG: I hate Christmas.

VL: You hate Christmas?

LG: So Mr. Whickman. Now that you've got us right where you've wanted us this whole time, what is it that you want?

CW: I want us to have a little talk about your future.

[[SFX: tape recorder stops]]

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ars PARADOXICA was created by Daniel Manning & Mischa Stanton. Episode 21: Jailbreak features –

Kristen DiMercurio (Sally Grissom)
Reyn Beeler (Chet Whickman)
Katie Speed (Esther Roberts)
Lia Peros (Petra)
L Jeffrey Moore (Lou Gaines)
Lauren Shippen (Maggie Elbourne)
Rebekah Allen (Bridget Chambers)
Hannah Trobaugh (June Barlowe)
Lee Satterwhite (Ben Quigley)
Eric Rafael Ibarra (Victor Lambert)
Billy Finn, Julian Mundy, Mischa Stanton (additional voices)
with special thanks to Isabel Atkinson

Fight choreography by Danielle Shemaiah. Production help from Dan Powell. "Clair de Lune" composed by Claude Debussy. Original music by Mischa Stanton and by Eno Freedman-Brodmann.

ars PARADOXICA is brought to you by The Internet: Where the opinions are made up and the facts don't matter.

24 20 02 | 09 04 04 07 07 01 | 09 03 08 16 | 11 17 09 16 11 13 | 21 05 18 16
WEATHER: dark

22: Dawn

WRITTEN BY TAU ZAMAN
DIRECTED & SOUND DESIGN BY MISCHA STANTON

MISCHA STANTON (MS): Well, folks, it's finally here. On behalf of all the beautiful, talented people who bring you this cool thing, I just wanna say thank you. Thank you, thank you, to everyone out there listening for sticking with us this far. I don't wanna get in the way here, so without further ado… [*clap, clap*]

MS: This episode of *ars PARADOXICA* is brought to you by our friends at *Liberty Critical Research*.

[*slow piano music*]

A failed terraforming colony has endured generations of civil war. What remains is a gleaming city, walled off from the lawless fringe. An expedition sent by a covert government agency journeys to discover more about the looming threat of the fringe's violent inhabitants. *Liberty Critical Research* is a dangerous expedition into the unknown. If you like that, the *Liberty* universe continues into a graphic novel, an upcoming history book, and a pen and paper RPG based on the fifth edition of *Dungeons & Dragons*. You can find it at nerdyshow.com/liberty or wherever you get your podcasts. And consider listening to some of the other shows on the Nerdy Show Network. We're so grateful for their support.

[[SFX: tape recorder starts; pen scratching; a crowd gathers outside; door opens]]

MC: How's it going, Helen? Have everything you need?

HELEN PARTRIDGE (HP): I'm fine, thank you.

MC: Nailed down those lyrics yet? It's almost time to go on.

HP: [*hurriedly*] I'll be ready. Just have to make a last minute change...

[[SFX: Helen's tape recorder skips, then plays]]

MC: I can't believe you lugged that thing all the way in here.

HP: It helps me get my thoughts in order.

MC: Listen, don't sweat it. Anything will be fine. As long as the words are in time with the music, you're *guaranteed* to put on a good show! I mean it. You're gonna knock their socks off.

STAGE MANAGER: Five minutes!

HP: Thank-you-five!

MC: ...I'll get you when it's time.

HP: Alright.

[[SFX: door closes; pen scratches; radio tuning. Esther and Chet walk down a hallway, their voices echoing off the concrete walls]]

CHET WHICKMAN (CW): Esther, I'm serious. If word of this gets out to anyone, especially someone in ODAR, this whole place falls apart!

ESTHER ROBERTS (ER): [*placatingly*] Don't worry, I've got it handled. No one knows about him. I didn't even put a guard on duty for this corridor. Everyone else thinks it's empty.

CW: Right, no guards. [*beat*] I guess that means one of us has to feed him?

ER: [*resigned*] And take him to the bathroom.

CW: Goddammit, Roberts! How did a Soviet agent break in here!?

ER: I'm just glad Anthony tipped us off in time. This guy doesn't even... look the part.

CW: What do you mean?

ER: You'll see. Ready?

CW: [*sigh*] Open it.

[[SFX: Esther enters a code for the door]]

CW: You said you found him in your office? And he told you his name.

ER: Yeah, like he was *waiting* to be found.

[[SFX: The door clangs open; walkie-talkie]]

GUARD: [*on walkie*] Ms. Roberts? Victor Lambert's cell just opened up, no authorized key access—

ER: [*quickly*] Just close it again, thanks.

CW: What was that about?

ER: Unlocking this cell also opens Victor Lambert's for a brief moment.

CW: *Why* would you bind both cells to the same key?

ER: If I gave each their own key, everyone would know we have two prisoners. You'd prefer we keep this one off the books, right?

CW: What if someone opens Lambert's cell?

ER: Vice-versa, this one here opens. But how often do you plan on opening Lambert's door?

CW: Lambert's? *Never*. A Soviet spy's, *quite often*. You can see the predicament.

ER: Look, I'm working on it. Bear in mind, I didn't exactly have a lot of time to plan this.

CW: Alright! Alright. Let's take a look at this guy.

[[SFX: the cell's inner door opens]]

AMELIN VASILIEVICH (AV): Ah, my lady with the very strong backhand. I'm impressed you needed no guards to apprehend me.

CW: Amelin Vasilievich, eh? Quite a name for a man who doesn't *look* very Soviet.

AV: I don't understand your meaning.

CW: Well. Let's just say I didn't realize they got so much sun in Siberia! [*chortle*]

AV: Believe it or not, some of us look like this.

CW: Your English is pretty good!

AV: I've studied all my life.

CW: Why?

AV: All the better to bring you some valuable advice. Consider it a peace offering from your friends across the Bering Strait.

CW: So we're taking gifts from the Soviets now!

AV: You'll want this one.

ER: How do we know this advice will be any good?

AV: [*smugly*] Let's just say it's about something yet to happen. Something we may prefer to avoid. Even if the Soviet Union wins in the end, things might go far more smoothly for all of us if we became friends here and now.

CW: What the hell do you mean you guys win?

ER: —Chet.

AV: She's figured it out.

CW: Figured out what?

AV: How I got in here!

ER: And—

AV: How I know things. [*laughing knowingly*]

ER: Oh my god.

CW: Roberts?

ER: Chet...The Soviets...They have a Timepiece!

[[SFX: radio tuning; Nikhil gasps awake]]

MATEO MORALES (MM): Shh, it's alright!

NIKHIL SHARMA (NS): Goddamnit. Another one!

MM: About ODAR killing you again?

NS: Killing *you*, Mateo!

MM: I'll be fine here. You're just nervous about the mission. Get some sleep; you've still got an hour or so before you have to go. I'll wake you up.

NS: If I've only got an hour left I'd rather—

MM: Spend it with me? Aww, awen't you a wittle womantic! [*laugh*]

NS: Cut it out! [*pause*] I was saying... I'd rather watch the sunrise.

MM: Mmm. It's pretty, right? Stars are still out. Speaking of stars... [*dramatically*] I see the beacons! Dotting the arc of time! Lighting the way to daaawn!

NS: [*chuckle*] ...Listen, Mateo, I just… I've been thinking about something. Maybe too late, but...

MM: What is it?

NS: When June Barlowe writes about the beacons at the end of her life… it's a little dramatic, right? I mean, she's spent her whole life trying to take down ODAR, realizes she's hit a wall with the schematics on the anchor point, and then just...waxes poetic?

MM: I dunno. The anchor points seemed like the way out for her. As they do for us. That's the whole point of you building one in Sally Grissom's time, right?

NS: It just seems… a very specific way to put it. What if… what if she knew she'd never finish it in her lifetime?

MM: I mean, most of the Anchorites had to make peace with that. They just had to hope that whoever came after them would pick up where they left off. Like we're doing.

NS: But she had to have some method of passing the torch.

MM: Then she'd need to find some way to preserve her work without ODAR getting a hold of it. I'll admit, when I looped around snatching her diaries, it didn't feel like the most revolutionary way to carry out her legacy.

NS: The best way to do it would be...

NS/MM: —to encode it!

MM: But even if she encodes it, she's trying to share it with people *all across time*. You can't exactly do that with a numbers station.

NS: Right. Airwaves won't work. You'd need a numbers station that could broadcast—

MM: Across time! [*pause; soft gasp*] The *beacons*.

NS: I used to think they were anchor points; but what if they weren't?

MM: What if the beacons June was talking about… are numbers stations? Like the one they used to use in the old days — codes over the airwaves!

NS: We just established that's impossible. Impossible! Radio waves don't time travel.

MM: Tachyons do. So if you could rig a device to execute a series of extremely precise tachyon emissions, you could use them as a code. Any Anchorites across time could read those emissions.

NS: You—You're a genius, you know that?

MM: Handsome, to boot.

NS: I mean there's no way we can be sure—

MM: If I'm handsome?

NS: If—if the beacons she's talking about are numbers stations.

MM: Test it out when you're following those kids through time. If you pick up a pattern of tachyon emissions, you'll know you're onto something. If you see any Anchorites in Sally's time, maybe give them a hint?

NS: But… the Anchorites could be trying to contact us right now!

MM: I'll see if I can read any emissions here in this time. I'll need *something* to do when you're gone.

NS: [*overwhelmed*] This objective list just gets bigger and bigger.

MM: Speaking off getting bigger…

NS: Oh, you have the filthiest mind!

MM: [*laugh*] I'm just trying to get as much time with my doctor before he goes back in time!

NS: Don't remind me… It keeps sinking in that I might never see you again if this anchor point doesn't work.

MM: Hey! None of that. Who knows—if this numbers station thing turns out to be real, maybe we'll have some way of staying in touch.

NS: How will I know if it's you?

MM: If you ever decode a transmission and it just says, "Hey, loser," — you'll know it's me.

NS: ...I love you.

[[SFX: They kiss deeply; radio tuning]]

LOU GAINES (LG): So, Mr. Whickman, now that you've got us right where you wanted us this whole time, what is it that you want?

CW: I want us to have a little talk about your future. I'm sure if we put our heads together— all… eleven of us in here—we can iron it out quite nicely for everyone involved.

FUTURE PETRA (FP): Carmen?! What're you doing here?

CARMEN (C): Hey, Petra... Petras.

FP: Carmen, what the *hell* are you doing pointing a gun at all of us? And at...other me!

CW: Now, now. *I'll* be the one asking questions here.

[[SFX: walkie]]

ER: [*on walkie*] Chet, are you alone? I need to—

CW: I'm not alone, Esther. In fact, I've got Victor Lambert here with me. [*sarcastically*] Know anything about that?

ER: That... can't be good. Chet, if Lambert's there with you that means the other cell opened too.

CW: ...*Dammit*! Esther, you need to check on him right now!

ER: I—I am, I am! He's...gone. The cell's empty. Whickman, do you hear me? He's gone.

AV: [*on walkie*] Looking for me?

ER: [*horrified*] Oh my—

[[SFX: walkie]]

CW: Esther!

BRIDGET CHAMBERS (BC): *Ettie*! She could be hurt!

SALLY GRISSOM (SG): Whickman? What the hell was that?

CW: Esther, report! ...Shit! Carmen, hold the room.

C: Oh, sure, just me against… nine other people. No problem.

CW: [*in the background*] Esther, Esther, come in! Esther, do you hear me? Esther? Report!

ORIGINAL PETRA (OP): So you're "against" me now?

C: Maybe if you hadn't come back like… this, I wouldn't be!

CW: *Thankfully* none of them thought to bring a gun.

LG: Like hell I didn't!

[[SFX: Lou draws a gun; the room erupts in tense reactions]]

CW: We have the area surrounded. Put that down. You're not getting out of here.

LG: Neither are you!

SG: Enough with the fucking guns! [*pause*] Nobody ever learns.

CW: ...Listen. Esther is in danger—

MAGGIE ELBOURNE (ME): And we're not, with guns in our faces?

VICTOR LAMBERT (VL): [*laughing*]

CW: Miss Elbourne, this is bigger than the people in this room. *ODAR* is in danger. Our *country* is in danger. And not in the way you treasonous bastards want!

BC: Lou, please, let him through.

BEN QUIGLEY (BQ): Bridget, this was not the plan. Don't back down on us now.

CW: Quentin. Barlowe. Are you looking to die a second time?

C: [*nervously*] Director Whickman? Maybe we should call in the backup—

CW: We're not gonna need it. Don't forget we've got a gun too, and they're going to let us by any minute now.

JUNE BARLOWE (JB): You seem awfully certain!

CW: I do Ms. Barlowe, because at least one of you here is sensible enough... You. You must be Bridget Chambers, right?

BC: I am.

JB: Bridget, ignore him.

BC: [*testily*] June—

CW: You're a smart lady, That much is… clear from having pulled this much off. Surely you can convince your friends here to see reason.

BC: ...Lou, please, he needs to find Ettie.

ME: Do I need to remind you what that woman put me through?

BC: [*desperately*] I'm sorry Maggie, something terrible is happening to her right now and I can't bear—

LG: You really think this was going to happen without anyone getting hurt?

CW: You're... Louis Gaines. I bet you're looking for David Marian? He's in danger too. Let me through, and I'll have him contact you. If he makes it. Clock's ticking.

SG: On one condition: I'm coming with you. If Roberts is in trouble there's no way you're keeping me here.

JB: Are you kidding me Sally? We have a—mission here!

SG: The mission's gone to shit, June! Besides, Victor Lambert doesn't look like he's in any mood to be convinced!

VL: Hey! Says who?

CW: You know, Sally, your loyalties always confound me.

C: Would be one fewer person for me to keep an eye on.

SG: C'mon, Whickman. The situation's changed. You know it. Your gun's not gonna fix it.

CW: Not yet, anyway… [*sigh*] Alright. Carmen, let her go. But only her. Now, you going let me through?

BQ: Don't do it Lou.

JB: This is a win condition!. Don't let him go!

CW: David Marian could be dying as we speak.

[*beat*]

[[SFX: Lou puts his gun down]]

JB: Ugh!

LG: I'm going with you. I need to see what happened to David for myself.

BC: Ettie's in trouble. I'm coming.

CW: This isn't a goddamn party!

BC: You're in no position to bargain!

CW: [*laugh*] You think like an ODAR agent. Fine. We don't have time for this. Come on.

[[SFX: Chet, Sally, Bridget, and Lou begin to walk away.]]

CW: And don't think I forgot about you, Lambert.

VL: Dammit! You sure you can't just leave me out here? Sounds like your car's getting a little crowded.

CW: Oh, we'll make room. You're not leaving my sight.

[[SFX: radio tuning; driving fast]]

SG: Slow down, you're gonna kill us.

CW: That would solve a lot of problems!

SG: Do you even hear yourself right now?

VL: Ooh, I sense a bumpy ride ahead!

BC: Will you just shut up?

LG: Let's just remember who's still got the gun here.

VL: All right, all right!

CW: Sally, you're in the car because I had no choice if I wanted to get to Esther. I'm not interested in your judgments.

SG: No, we *need* to talk about this. You have a serious problem. All of ODAR does!

CW: [*laugh*] That's—that's rich, Sally! Because pretty much all of my problems can be traced back to you.

SG: You make more than enough of your own, Whickman. I swear you pull a gun faster than *anyone* I've ever seen—

CW: Oh, we're back to the Sharma incident, again? Sally, maybe this is hard for you to understand because you have *no* concept of personal responsibility—

SG: *You* want to tell *me* about personal responsibility?! Do you have any idea what this last year has *been* like for me?!

CW: —If you'll let me *finish*, what I'm saying is, the safety and livelihood of every single person in ODAR *and* in this country falls on *my* shoulders. And if I see a threat, like a foreign agent with *zero* clearance who has clearly breached our security, I'm going to shoot. [*beat*] He was your friend, I get it. And… I'm sorry I had to kill your friend, alright?

SG: No, you don't get it.

CW: Then what am I missin' here, Sally?

SG: This whole... "If you see a foreigner, you're gonna shoot" thing... It's not just you.

CW: I—I don't understand.

SG: Whickman, you have no idea what it's like back in my time... People *still* do that. It's how the country *does* things, where I'm from. You just see someone different from you, so you think they're dangerous, and you just… [*sharp inhale*] fire!

CW: That's because they didn't have ODAR. We can stop these tragedies from happening, Sally. We can make America—

SG: [*passionately*] —*Don't*. Don't say it, Whickman. [*pause*] Please. It never stops. The problem isn't that we didn't have time travel. The problem is us. And it doesn't just happen to people like Nikhil, it happens...

LG: [*quietly*] To people like me. Every day.

SG: Yes. And even...

BC: ...People like me.

SG: ...Yeah.

VL: Makes ya wonder what the whole goddamn point of time travel is...

BC: ...if you can't fix people.

[*beat*]

CW: Sally, I…. I'm just Chet Whickman. I'm not every red blooded American man who's ever fired a gun.

LG: Hah! You sure look like 'em.

CW: You need to move past this. ODAR has done a *lot* of good already—

SG: [*increasing in indignation*] Really? What good, Whickman? Meddled in some court proceedings, rigged an election or two? Can you think of any other global tragedies on a slightly larger scale that ODAR could've *maybe* prevented?

CW: What, what, you want us to become time traveling Nazi hunters?

SG: Did you even try?

CW: That's ridiculous, Sally, and you know it! Sure, fine, yes it was an atrocity, I get that!

SG: That we *never* talk about!

CW: Because it's logistically impossible to even try to do anything about it! My hands were tied.

LG: Men in power tend to say that.

CW: What, you don't think I want to save the world with time travel? Sometimes you have to look at things *rationally*, and make a *call* about the things you have the *power* to change.

BC: With that many lives on the line, I don't think *I* could so coolly write it off as not even worth trying!

CW: Do you think Esther didn't care five years ago? She was… aghast! We both were! But she knew how to set aside her feelings and focus on our mission. And if she [*incredulous laugh*] of all people, can do it, the rest of us have no excuse.

SG: ...We're almost there, can you reach her yet?

[[SFX: Chet picks up the walkie]]

CW: Esther? Esther, can you hear me?... Still can't hear anything.

SG: How'd you get so much range out of those things anyway?

CW: We'll have to go in blind. Get ready.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

ME: ...Could you please stop pointing that at us?

OP: Carmen, put it down.

FP: You're not gonna shoot me. Us.

C: ...Of course not.

[[SFX: Carmen uncocks her gun; June and Ben breathe easier]]

JB: That's better.

BQ: So are there, uh...future Carmens, too?

C: Just me, for now.

OP: You look… good!

C: Do you have any idea how worried I was? Not even ODAR could track you down. I looked, and looked, and waited, and waited, until...I realized: you'd figured it out. You'd gotten out of *all* of this. You were moving forward — not just in that way — I mean...you were moving forward through time! *Finally*. One of the two of us was doing it.

FP: What do you mean one of us, Carmen? You have your whole life ahead of you too.

C: At ODAR all they do is pick at the past! Write it and rewrite it over and over. They're... *drowning* in it.

OP: Look, I know you told me last time why you couldn't leave, and I know it seemed like I wasn't listening then, but. I get it now, I do. It still has to be better than staying here!

C: Wait, do you think I enjoyed staying here?

FP: ...Carmen, you need to tell me right now, are they… are they doing it again?! What they did to us?

C: No. I made *absolutely* sure it never. Happens. Again. It's just... Well, Director Whickman finds me useful. By god, if he's got even one agent immune to Butterfly Syndrome he's gonna make use of them.

OP: ...They've been sending you back. Over and over. Just like always!

C: It's different this time! This time, I want to do it. For the greater good.

ME: Carmen, you must know there's no way to be sure if you're actually immune to it or not. Your childhood neuroplasticity maybe made you immune, but as an adult, you may only be resistant. And I'm concerned they're working you beyond your limits.

C: What better way for Director Whickman to find out if this experiment actually worked?

ME: [*darkly*] He and Miss Roberts have quite a bit in common...

BQ: They sure know how to make lemonade outta limes.

JB: Sounds he's gonna have to make more than he bargained for.

OP: Yeah, what the hell is going on?

C: I don't know, I mean... it's classified! I—I'm not even supposed to be *speaking* to you!

FP: Carmen, nobody in the world knows you better. You're not gonna keep secrets from me now.

C: ...Nobody's told me anything about it. But, from the sound of it, they have another prisoner. I know Miss Roberts has been anxious about the Soviets, as in, more than usual. Maybe he's a spy?

BQ: This would be the part where Victor Lambert chimes in, and tells us our efforts are futile, and we're all gonna die.

JB: Ben, please!

BQ: I've never seen a man so bitter.

C: He's been imprisoned a long time.

BQ: He said something about ODAR having all our numbers.

ME: He's right. If ODAR kills us all now, they've squashed us for good. We're sitting ducks in here.

C: I'm not letting you guys out of here.

ME: Carmen. I've… heard at least a little bit about what kind of testing they did on you.

C: I really don't wanna talk about it.

OP: Maggie, don't—

ME: I'll have had to put my subjects through similar testing, and… I'm sorry. You didn't deserve that.

C: You mean you've already had to.

[[SFX: static distortion]]

ME: What? That's what I said.

C: Well *I* said, I don't want to talk about it! Your good cop act is not gonna work on me.

ME: We can stop this. We can make sure that what they did to you never happens to anyone else, ever again.

C: I've already made sure of that.

OP: But you just told me you're still living your life in reverse!

C: ...This cabin's surrounded. We have snipers in the trees. You're never gonna get out of here.

OP: But *we* can!

FP: If you let us!

C: And if you get out? So what? I'm still here.

OP: You can come with us!

JB: We may have lost Victor but we can find some other way to get a Rainbow generator.

BQ: Right now what we need is time. You can give us that, Carmen.

C: I… [*shaky breath*] I can't do it. This is it. This is home. We've talked about this, Petra. ODAR still does a lot of good, and if I'm the one who has to

sacrifice to keep it together, then so be it! [*softly*] No one's better made for this job than me.

OP: That's just what it seems like for now! You're so deep in this...shit! They've warped you, Carmen. They've made you think there's no way out for you, ever.

BQ: Always darkest before dawn, and whatnot.

OP: But it's not true! Trust me, life outside of ODAR isn't dandy, but it's a life. If I got away, you can. I—I know, I know, this is home. [*pause*] But it's time you left. I *promise* you, just taking that first step out of here is going to change everything about what you thought home is. It did for me. *Please*, you have to believe me.

[*beat*]

BQ: Sun's coming up.

JB: Stars are still out... Do you remember when we used to—never mind.

BQ: No, tell me.

JB: You told me once how the stars are lights from years and years ago, just reaching us now. Like a hello from another time. Sometimes I wish I could say hello to Quentin. My Quentin. That's all.

BQ: It's alright. I get it. If we get out of this alive, and I go back in time, I'll be that Quentin for you. Promise.

[*beat*]

C: They're going to kill me. You don't just get to quit ODAR. Not when you're their prized experiment... Don't make me regret this, Petra.

FP: [*sigh of relief*] I won't. Thank you, Carmen.

OP: Yeah, thank you!

C: [*authoritatively*] Put your hands behind your head! Walk outside in a straight line!

[[SFX: radio tuning; Chet, Bridget, Sally and Victor burst in]]

CW: Esther! Esther, you here? Esther?

BC: Ettie!

SG: Oh my god, she's hurt, bad.

BC: Somebody help me!

SG: Lambert, here, hold her head.

VL: Uh, blood is really not my—oh, okay, well, it's on me now.

ER: [*groan*]

BC: Get a medic in here!

CW: Esther, what happened? Where is he?

ER: ...Gone...

CW: We need to search the perimeter!

ER: No… *Gone*...

BC: Shh, don't speak...

SG: Whickman… I think she means—

CW: He used the Timepiece. God… Goddammit!

SG: So we now have a Soviet spy...

VL: Who probably took something from Chet Whickman's office...

SG: And is now hiding somewhere in Point-of-Exile, some*when* in *our* past.

CW: FUCK!

[[SFX: Lou enters]]

LG: Mister Whickman, you promised me I'd see David Marian. He's not where you told me he'd be.

CW: He's not on assignment; he should've been in his quarters.

LG: This was all I could find.

SG: A tape? Man, I really am a trendsetter. Does anyone *not* keep audio diaries?

BC: Ettie? ...Ettie? Ettie! Why isn't she answering me, somebody do something!

CW: I can listen to this once we've gotten her help. Come on, help me lift her!

[[SFX: radio tuning; Timepiece spools up]]

DM: I don't have much time. I just want to say that… Lou, if I knew you at all, you're going to come find me one day. At least, I thought you would. Turns out I have to leave before you ever get the chance.

AV: Clock is ticking, my friend!

DM: I'll be just a moment! I'm sorry I vanished, Lou. I shouldn't have done that. I knew you'd worry, and I still think you're gonna find your way to ODAR some day, no matter what they tried to do to keep you. It's the kind of work you're suited for. More than me, anyway.

You know you were supposed to be in ODAR, right? But they sent me back...to burn your offer letter. I wondered why they didn't just go back in time and not send you a letter at all! Would've been much simpler. But now I know they were *testing* me. It was all a question of loyalty for them.

Speaking of loyalty… this… doesn't look good for me. Why am I running off with a Soviet agent? Because someone, anyone, has got to serve as a check to what ODAR can do. No one nation should have all that power. Learned that from... you, I guess.

I hope you piece together enough to understand why I did what I did. ODAR will never take me back. But I'll see you, my friend. Maybe in this life, most likely the next.

AV: You may see that next life quicker than you think if you don't start this damned apparatus!

[[SFX: David enters coordinates and activates the final sequence]]

AV: They'll be bursting through the door any minute.

DM: Goodbye, Lou.

[[SFX: Timepiece activates; radio tuning; a hospital room]]

BC: So he's run off with the Soviet spy? That can't be good.

CW: [*laughing*]

LG: What's so goddamn funny?

CW: You know, we had intel that you'd be the one who defects to the Soviets. That's why we sent David Marian to stop you.

LG: There's plenty I still have to teach him, then.

CW: Well, he's gone, now. [*beat*] You could… help me look for him.

BC: You can't be serious!

SG: You're just going to *kill* him if you find him.

LG: You want me to join ODAR? After all this?

CW: You were meant to join us, all told. The only reason you couldn't is because of a possible sympathetic tie to the Soviets… *Clearly* our intel failed us on that front.

BC: You're a snake, you know that?

CW: And what about you, Ms. Chambers? You seem… unusually concerned for Esther here.

BC: She's my friend. She's important to me.

CW: Yes, that much is, uh… clear. Well, as you know, here at ODAR we're a… diverse bunch—

SG: *Really*, Chet?

BC: What's your point?

CW: Well, at ODAR, as long as you can deliver results, we don't care who you are... Unless you're a Soviet, I'm sure you understand my meaning.

BC: Are you seriously trying to use my concern for my friend —

CW: Esther would remain your superior of course. She's not really one for friends, from what I understand. But, someone of your talents… we could benefit from that.

BC: Ettie already tried to recruit me! But Lou's warned me about joining up with you people.

CW: You mean the same Lou that's mulling over a job with us as we speak?

LG: What if I don't take it?

CW: Sign some forms, swear you don't tell a soul what you saw, and you return to civilian life.

LG: [*disbelievingly*] I just broke into your base and you'll let me walk?

CW: ...You're right. I won't. So here's the real offer. Take the job. Work for ODAR like you've always wanted to—whether you realize it or not—or, waste away in the same cell as Victor Lambert, which I swear to you might've opened tonight by accident, but will never, *ever* open again.

LG: ...I'll do it. On the condition that if I find David, you do him no harm.

CW: Done. If *you* find him. Ms. Chambers?

BC: I… don't know. Sally, what should I do?

SG: Listen, I'm here because Roberts, for all of her sneaky puppetmaster bullshit, is one of my few friends on this earth. [*beat*] But she's also in charge of a government agency that has a pretty *iffy* relationship with ethics. And keeping them on the straight and narrow is clearly going to take a lot of work from a lot of good people. So, is it worth giving up your life? I've got a *long* list of people who'd beg to differ. But *you* are good. Smart. Whickman sees that, Roberts clearly did too.

CW: The more important question is, now that you know what she really does—what we *all* do here—can you just go back to... shelving books?

BC: Excuse me! I don't shelve books, I—never mind. You know, you might be able to change the course of history but—

CW: —I haven't read enough history myself, right? That's what you were going to say.

BC: ...Well, you clearly haven't.

CW: And you have! So you can help us.

BC: I'm not signing up to be ODAR's librarian.

CW: What do you want to be?

BC: I'll join if you let me figure it out as I go. And if that means getting up in your face and telling you you're wrong, you're just going to have to remember that you're the one who recruited me. *I* refuse to leave history in the hands of men.

SG: That's more like it!

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

FP: See anyone behind us?

ME: Won't be seeing any signs of ODAR on our tail, if that's what you mean.

FP: How can you be sure?

ME: What do you mean?

FP: You just said we won't be finding any ODAR tailing us.

[[SFX: static distortion]]

ME: [*clears throat*] Sorry — I meant I'm not seeing any now.

OP: Do you want me to take the wheel?

C: We don't have any time.

OP: Yes, we do. We're far enough away now to switch.

C: I'm fine!

OP: Carmen, come on.

C: ...Just let me pull over.

[[SFX: Carmen pulls over; her and Petra exit the car; birds]]

BQ: You cold?

JB: It's freezing.

BQ: Here, take my coat.

JB: No, then you'll freeze!

BQ: Fine. Let's share.

[[SFX: Petra and Carmen re-enter the car; Petra pulls back onto the road]]

OP: Okay... Ready?

BQ: Where are we going, anyway?

OP: Hell, anywhere far away from Point-of-Exile is the best we can manage right now.

ME: Some rest will be nice. We'll have been up all night.

[[SFX: static distortion]]

FP: There you *go* with that again. "We'll have been up all night?" It's already morning.

ME: Sorry... just need some rest, like I said.

FP: Maggie, you know what's going on, right?

ME: What, that these are the warning signs of… what did you call it, Butterfly Syndrome? You think I don't know?

JB: Why wouldn't you tell us?

ME: It wouldn't do us much good. Besides, we still need to finish the anchor point, right?

BQ: Right… about that...

C: None of us… really know how to make one.

OP: Now that we're on the lamb and cut off from Sally… Ben, you're pretty much our only scientist.

BQ: And I still need to go back and marry June.

ME: Don't do it.

OP/FP/JB: What?

ME: I hardly touched time travel myself. I let *mice* do it. And look what's happening to *me*.

BQ: The other option is... to stay. And to help rebuild an anchor point.

ME: That's right.

BQ: It's gonna take years, you know.

JB: And it means you staying here while the past me… stays husband-less.

BQ: Let me...make it up to you?

JB: *How*?

BQ: You know what they say about the present: there's no time like it. I'd love to know what kind of woman I was supposed to be falling in love with. A practice run, if you will.

JB: Just practice?

BQ: Well, I wouldn't want to presume.

JB: You know if you stay in this timeline with me, you're going against everything that's already happened in our history. [*hesitating*] If you stay here—

BQ: You're right. If I stay here, there's no involving you with ODAR in the first place. Which means, potentially none of this even happens.

JB: Are you willing to... take that kind of risk?

BQ: On making an anchor point? [*pause*] On making a life with you?

JB: Both?

BQ: ...I think I could do that.

ME: ...Hey, is it unseasonably warm in this car, or what?

C: What about you, Maggie? What're you gonna do once you build this anchor point?

ME: Well, I can't exactly elope through time with my spouse. That... flashy exit seems taken. But… I want to stay with you all, if you'll have me. If we really do build this anchor point, it means people are going to have to use it, a lot, if they'll want to undermine ODAR. Which means more Para—Butterfly Syndrome. I'm going to find some way to counteract it.

C: You mean—

ME: Humanely, of course.

JB: There won't be any shortage of things to work on. We can't just *make* an anchor point, we're going to have to find some way of communicating with each other without ODAR listening in.

C: Right, you had some idea?

JB: Well!—

[[SFX: tape fast-forward]]

FP: So, Petra, last night we wondered what we'd do, as… Petras, if we got Victor Lambert and did the thing. Well, we kinda did it. Now what?

OP: I don't know. Can I be honest with you? This feels...

FP: Weird?

OP: Yeah. The last three weeks with myself have been a blast, but... It's not right. I keep finding myself wondering… what you'd have to say about something, but you're only three weeks older than I am! I can't even trust my own brain when there's another me five feet away.

FP: I get it, trust me. The benefit of us being the same person is, well, I feel pretty much the same way.

OP: It's all... uncharted territory now. No point in both of us staying stuck with this life. Just *go*.

FP: I couldn't leave you guys! It seems like you need all the help you can get with this anchor point.

OP: Whatever you'd think of, I—I would too.

FP: Are you… are you sure?

OP: You should know I am.

FP: ... Plus I guess it means we have a much smaller chance of getting caught...

C: Aw, I was thinking you two would play twins the whole time!

FP: Shut up!

OP: Very funny. Let's just get somewhere safe and if you want to part ways there, we can. Okay?

FP: Sure.

ME: We'll miss you, future Petra.

FP: Hey, I'm not gone yet! Hey uh... Original-me? God, I hate that name.

OP: Yeah?

FP: You know how we both agreed to record our own diaries? I still think we should do that.

OP: Can do.

FP: And um. You, uh. You did a pretty darn good job too. I'm proud of us.

OP: I am, too.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

SG: So all I'm saying is, I know we haven't been the best at keeping in touch, but… Whickman told me you warned him about the breach with the Soviet agent, and that may have spoiled our plans, but… thanks. You're still doing your job, and I can admire that.

Roberts is [*slow inhale*] gonna be alright, I think. Maybe different. And June, Ben. Maggie, Carmen, the Petras… Whickman says we'll find them. For their sake, I hope we never do, but with Lambert and the generator still in his hands, Whickman's less worried about what damage the Anchorites can do. For the time being.

Now that Gaines and Chambers joined up, he thinks he can sweet-talk anyone. Sometimes I forget he was just some Petty Officer on the Eldridge, probably making coffee runs for Bill Donovan. Hm. He's come a long way.

[[SFX: The Blackroom; Sally speaks on a recording]]

SG: Anyway. Let's actually, um. Talk again, sometime soon, maybe? If you want.

AP: Sally, I, uh, I'm glad to hear you're alright. And that Esther is too. I mean, I knew she was going to be... But I don't have any intel about this…

Amelin Vasilievich. Once he goes further back into the past. I'm worried how much this throws things off. Send me all the info you can, which is to say, um. Yeah, I'd like it if we talked more. [*heavy sigh*] Thanks.

[[SFX: computer alert]]

AP: Huh. A note from Whickman. "Loyalty rewarded. Open box..." Does he mean *my* boxes? That I have a limited number of, and are supposed to be expressly for *my* personal use?! Jerk. Still, if he thought it worth burning… one of my genie wishes…

[[SFX: Anthony opens a crate]]

AP: It's a… record. Hmm...Okay?

[[SFX: Anthony plays the record; "When I'm Not Here" plays]]

HP: *A man only desires*
A few things out of life
His career, his castle, and some late-night snugglin'
And a spineless kind of wife

Well I've waited a while for a sorry,
For a baby, just one more chance
I've got my life to live
I'm no mood to forgive
And tonight I'm going to have my dance

'Fore I go one question my dear
Where you going to be when I'm not here?

My mama taught me one lesson
I've heeded all these years
Hold your man as tight as you can and you'll never be in tears
Girls like us, we have to work at it
We gotta pick up our hearts where they left 'em

We're not the thinnest in line
We're not the sinning kind
But we'll be damned if
A man's going to ruin our night

'Fore I go one question my dear
Where you gonna be when I'm not here?

Where you gonna be when I'm not here?

[[SFX: song ends; Anthony picks up a crowbar and smashes the record player; tape recorder stops]]

ars PARADOXICA is created by Daniel Manning & Mischa Stanton.
Episode 22: Dawn features -

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Reyn Beeler (Chet Whickman)
Katie Speed (Esther Roberts)
Robin Gabrielli (Anthony Partridge)

L. Jeffrey Moore (Lou Gaines)
Preston Allen (Bridget Chambers)
Lia Peros (Petra)
Gabriela Milo (Carmen)
Arjun Gupta (Nikhil Sharma)
Bernardo Cubría (Mateo Morales)
Hannah Trobaugh (June Barlowe)
Lee Satterwhite (Ben Quigley)
Lauren Shippen (Maggie Elbourne)
Eric Rafael Ibarra (Victor Lambert)
Susanna Kavee (Helen Partridge)
Kathy Dorn, Mark Soloff, Todd Faulkner, Tauheed Zaman (additional voices)
with special thanks to Isabel Atkinson

Featuring the song "When I'm Not Here," written by Tau Zaman, arranged by Evan Cunningham, featuring Susanna Kavee as Helen Partridge.
Additional original music by Mischa Stanton and Eno Freedman-Brodmann.
ars PARADOXICA is brought to you by The Internet: [[SFX: dial-up sound]]

07 03 | 23 | 07 14 13 05 11 12 18 18 24 25 01 21 | 13 18 01 01 23
WEATHER: clear

Ars Paradoxica

Season Three

23: Contact

WRITTEN BY DANIEL MANNING
DIRECTED & SOUND DESIGN BY MISCHA STANTON

[[SFX: tape recorder starts]]

SALLY GRISSOM (SG): Diary of Sally Grissom, February 27th, 1953. I feel like I haven't done one of these in months. I've been a little lax on the diaries, sure, but maybe my life hasn't been all that eventful since... well, since the Anchorites. In the three years after that, I formally rejoined ODAR, which is kind of a big deal. I haven't been an official part of Team Time since my accident, and it felt good to trade in my trowel for a soldering iron again.

I know I'm always the one complaining about ODAR–I mean, not ALWAYS the only one, ask anybody–but I think they've turned some kinda corner, this time. There's this new committee, Ethics & Oversight, they're supposed to make ODAR less... terrible. Or more accountable. Some amount of something. I sat in on one of their meetings, it gets pretty trippy in there, even for me. I'll understand the paradox bits, more or less, but the ethics stuff? Ugh, makes my eyes glaze over. Watching Gaines and Chambers and Whickman and the rest of them debate about who owes what to whom in whichever timeline... it'll make your head spin. That's the right tense, right? Yeah. It- It'll make your head spin.

But with the good comes the bad, and with the bad, well... one of the things they're looking into are Carmen and Petra and the rest of the Plasticity kids, and precisely where it ranks on a scale between "double parking" and "double genocide." The thing is, somewhere, in some version of events, a version of Roberts in some future signed some paperwork that led to all of this happening, so that's triggered an inquiry into the doings of the Roberts of the present day, and that's caused its own mess. I've been working with her to prepare for her hearing, and it's not exactly... easy.

[[SFX: radio tuning, tape recorder]]

ESTHER ROBERTS (ER): And you've arrived on a methodology to test this hypothesis, Dr. Carling?

DR. ALDOUS CARLING (AC): I believe that additional stress will amplify the effect of paradox on the mind of the subject. Having them implement the mouse tests forces the subject to directly visualize the contradiction.

ER: Isn't there a risk of your own staff developing the sickness through the same second-hand mechanism you're testing?

AC: We've found that in groups, the mind can offload the mental strain to others. In contrast to that, we would be isolating the subject. As the

subject's sole point of contact with the "project," I can push her farther out of moral norms than she would ordinarily feel comfortable with.

ER: Saying "she" implies you have a candidate in mind.

AC: I know of someone qualified who desperately needs a position. If I tell her to jump, she'll say how high.

[[SFX: tape stops]]

ER: ...I know how this looks.

SG: Bad! It looks very very bad! They're gonna crucify you. Not literally. Probably.

ER: You don't understand! It was a long time ago.

SG: Three years! Three years after you let Dr. Carling run his mad science experiments on Maggie Elbourne. You gave that poor woman brain damage.

ER: We were at war–

SG: With whom? The war was over before we moved to Colorado! You had the Truman administration in the palm of your hand! And now that you're three minutes to midnight, you should get a free pass for your shitty choices that got us there?

ER: We saved lives , Sally. Dr. Carling's research paved the way for safe, effective treatment of Butterfly Syndrome. You're welcome.

SG: So obviously, your logical next step was to kidnap a bunch of children! And you know what, I've got a tape for that too!

[[SFX: Sally rummages through a box of tapes]]

ER: That. Wasn't. Me. But I gave them what they wanted. I let Petra leave. And Carmen's expertise has improved the long-term viability of our field agents by an incredible margin!

SG: Great! So you've increased the amount of time you can use them before they're a broken, disoriented husk you can replace–

ER: –At which point they have valiantly served their country and are well-provided for. You know the rigors of this job. You know that people sometimes take a backseat to science.

SG: Please don't say "We're not so different, you and I..."

ER: We're not, Sally. You want a whole speech or something? Where I tell you all that I've done, all that I've worked for is for the greater good?

SG: [scoff] The greater good.

ER: You saw this century play out already, and unless you're ready to surprise me with some utopian vision of the future, then you're just as aware as I am that there is no greater good. There's just shades of gray.

SG: So what shade of gray is sacrificing an innocent woman's well-being? What shade of gray is kidnapping children?

ER: –That wasn't my decision and you know it!

SG: You're right, it wasn't. So remind me again, where are Carmen and Petra now? Living a simple life on a comfortable stipend?

ER: They left! Of their own free will! You don't ever have to deal with this! You get to go back to your lab and tinker with whatever the hell you want on the taxpayer's dime, and I've got to justify it to Chet and the goddamn CIA!

SG: So, what, you're just gonna pass the buck and say that you don't have any agency in the matter?

ER: That's not what I'm saying! What I do, I do for my country, my role in keeping the world safe.

SG: Jesus, you sound just like Donovan.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

KENZO SUGIMURA (KS): Relay, it's Sugimura. I'm getting spooked they're going to show up. Give me another update on arrivals, over?

ANTHONY PARTRIDGE (AP): *(on radio)* Spoke with Hollis. There's nothing you don't already know about for 72 hours in either direction, over.

KS: Doable. Hey by the way, remind him that they still have my Fleetwood Mac 33s, over.

AP: *(on radio)* Wait, that doesn't make any sense–they're from the '70s, you're in '52, over?

KS: Are you gonna tell on me, over?

AP: *(on radio)* I guess not, Ken. Good luck, over and out.

KS: You better not.

[[SFX: Ken puts down the radio; a tea kettle boils; Ken pours tea; a pounding at the door]]

SOVIET CONTACT (CO): язык может скрывать правду– (The tongue may hide the truth–)

KS: –но глаза – никогда! (–But the eyes – never!) You're late.

CO: You should be suspicious if I arrive early.

KS: Would you like some tea?

CO: Да, пожалуйста. (Yes, please.)

[[SFX: Ken prepares another tea while they talk]]

KS: What's the latest at the dacha?

CO: I am restless. I'm waiting and waiting. I do not know why you have me wait.

KS: Because patience is a virtue. And because we're not ready yet.

CO: And who is we?

KS: You, me. My people.

CO: Heh. Your people. What a mystery. I could smell the West on you from first day we spoke.

KS: No. You didn't notice until our fourth meeting. I misused an idiom and you tried to understand why. Then you realized you the road to treason is paved with pleasantries.

CO: That first day, I thought you working for politician. Looking for leg up. "A real agent would not slip, I think..." Everyone makes mistakes, no?

KS: [chuckles] Did you get what I asked for?

[[SFX: The Contact slides a file to Ken]]

CO: Maps, guard protocols, all is there. Some I write myself, but I swear is all true. And you? You will get me out?

KS: So long as everything goes properly, we will assure you passage out of the Eastern Bloc.

CO: To America.

KS: Yes. To America.

CO: I must have this promise. Will not be safe to stay after.

KS: I swear. After you complete your task, a plane will be waiting for you. I will be on it. We will fly together. But I need to know: are you ready for this? Truly ready? Taking a life is an enormous act. He's the Premier of the Soviet Union... Your actions will echo throughout history, backwards and forwards.

CO: This is price I pay. When they take my sister, I realize my loyalty to regime would not spare my family from the violence. Do you have this? A person you would do for anything? Mother, eh... sister?

KS: My father. He worked his fingers to the bone for me. Even when... when things got rough back home, he made sure I was okay. I would do anything for him.

CO: So you understand. Love makes us do beautiful, terrible things. What would you have me do?

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

CO: *(on radio)* Final check. Everything is in place?

KS: For the fifth time, yes, everything is in place, and your routes are clear. As long as you follow the plan, the critical path has a 96% chance you never even cross anybody's eyeline.

CO: *(on radio)* And four percent that I do?

KS: It's a harmless glance, stay calm! You'll do fine. I'll be with you over the radio the whole time. Then you meet me back here, and we'll get you extracted.

CO: *(on radio)* Together?

KS: Together.

[[SFX: Through the radio, The Contact waits]]

JOSEF STALIN: *(on radio)* Дай мне спать! Я не хочу от тебя слышать до утра! (Let me sleep! I don't want to hear from any of you until morning!)

[[SFX: Through the radio, Stalin slams a door and collapses onto his bed; he snores loudly]]

CO: *(on radio)* Okay, Stalin is asleep. How you know this I do not know, but is not my place to ask.

[[SFX: Through the radio, The Contact climbs into Stalin's bedroom window; Stalin snorts, then returns to deep sleep]]

CO: *(on radio)* The Warfarin is in him. I will go.

KS: [sigh]

[[SFX: Through the radio, The Contact climbs back out and onto the street; he begins to walk away]]

SOVIET GUARD: *(on radio)* Остановитесь! Остановитесь, *Эй*! *Эй*! (Stop right there! Stop, hey! Hey!)

[[SFX: The Contact runs; Ken scrambles to pack up the safe house]]

KS: Oh shit... Relay, relay, relay! This is Sugimura! My contact's been made. I need you to get both of us a route out of Kuntsevo District, over!

[[SFX: static on the radio]]

KS: Uh, Relay? Second that for me, over.

[[SFX: static on the radio]]

CO: *(on radio)* Where do I go?

[[SFX: Banging on Ken's safehouse door]]

KS: Relay, I repeat, need instru ctions for egress from Kuntsevo district in my timeline on March 1, 1953, at 0100 hours.

[[SFX: static on the radio]]

KS: Blackroom, are you reading me, over?

[[SFX: static on the radio; banging on the door]]

KS: Dr. Partridge?

PETRA (P1): *(through the door)* Agent Sugimura! I'm with ODAR!

[[SFX: Ken runs to the door and opens it]]

KS: You're... you're not...

P1: I'm close enough. Come on, we need to get you out of here!

[[SFX: Petra leads Ken down the steps, out of the building, and out into the snow]]

KS: What about Luka?

P1: Your contact? I got him.

A SECOND PETRA (P2): *(on radio)* Luka! Luka Ilych Ivanov!

CO: *(on radio)* Кто вы? Уходите от меня! (Who are you? Get away from me!)

P2: I'm with your friend, I'm here to help!

KS: That's weird as hell, you know that?

P1: You’re assassinating world leaders, and I’m the weird one.

P2: *(on radio)* This way!

P1: This way. My car’s up here.

[[SFX: Petra & Ken trudge through the snow to the car and quickly get inside; Petra turns the ignition and begins driving]]

P1: What did you say to Partridge?

KS: What? I don’t know!

P1: You’re the last person that Anthony Partridge talked to in all of spacetime. Luka, what’s your status?

[[SFX: Through the radio, gunfire]]

CO: *(on radio)* They are chasing! (to P2) Is that your sister on radio?

P2: *(on radio)* Don’t worry about it. This way!

P1: We’ll be there soon!

KS: That doesn’t make any sense. The Blackroom has been sending communications until the 1990s at least!

P1: Just because it’s not linear for you doesn’t mean it isn’t for him. And he’s been completely silent since you took a message from Anthony at 21:45 your time.

KS: Shit!

P1: What did he say to you?

KS: He just said something about the mission, I don’t know, it was–

SOVIET GUARD: *(on radio)* Остановитесь, вы окружены! (Stop, you're surrounded!)

[[SFX: Through the radio, guns trained on Petra and Luka]]

P1: It doesn’t happen like this!

KS: What doesn’t?

CO: *(on radio)* Where do we go?

P2: *(on radio)* I don’t–

[[SFX: machine gun fire; Petra and Luka hit the ground; the radio cuts out]]

KS: Luka!

P1: That's not how this was supposed to work! I got away with your contact. That was me back there! Like, me me! Not some copy, not some variant, I just did this an hour ago.

KS: What the hell is going on?

P1 You tell me, Ken. Looks like we're all off-script today.

[[SFX: radio tuning; a ticking clock in Chet's house]]

CHET WHICKMAN (CW): Four... Five... Six...

[[SFX: phone rings; Chet answers]]

AMELIA ARNAULT (AA): *(on phone)* Thunderstorms.

CW: [sigh] I'm on my way.

[[SFX: Chet hangs up; radio tuning; Chet's office]]

CW: How long has it been?

AA: Eleven hours and thirty... eight minutes,

CW: What's the greatest interval he's ever taken?

AA: Three hours forty-five. But that was due to a timing error.

CW: And this time?

AA: The wires are dark, Director Whickman. We've sent a series of emergency pings but... nothing.

CW: What about other times? Other us-ses?

AA: We haven't heard from them. We can't hear from them. But if the flow has stopped to us, it's stopped for everybody.

[[SFX: phone rings; Amelia answers]]

AA: Mm-hmm?

[[SFX: she hangs up]]

AA: Ms. Roberts is on her way.

CW: When was Anthony's last communication?

AA: The... the Moscow job, sir.

CW: Beans and rice! What's the status on that?

AA: Real-time communication is down, but one of my contacts suggests that the mission was successful.

CW: We did it.

AA: But we haven't heard from Agent Sugimura since.

CW: Well, find him, okay?

AA: Sure, but... there's something else, sir.

CW: What is it?

AA: On your drive here I decided to pull all the records of Blackroom communications from the last hours and... I found something.

[[SFX: Amelia hands Chet a file]]

CW: Go on.

AA: An hour before the Blackroom went dark, Miss Roberts made a single document transfer to an unknown address. Did you know about this?

CW: Of course I don't know! What do you mean, unknown? Do we not have a lid our own damn Blackroom?

AA: I'm telling you, sir, it was to an address that doesn't correspond to any in my directory.

CW: And what was the document?

AA: I've only got the header code here, it's going to take a while to narrow down the precise one, but it's... it's from the Moscow job.

CW: She's... giving out secrets?

[[SFX: door opens, Esther enters]]

ER: Alright, what did I miss?

[[SFX: pause; radio tuning]]

ER: And so I've been instructed to not leave the cafeteria since then. They cleared everyone out for me and put guards at the door.

SG: An ethics investigation, then this... why did they put you here in the cafeteria, of all places?

ER: Chet knows that the second I'm formally arrested it's going to trigger a cascade of process and problems and oversight, and without the Blackroom, he doesn't know exactly what happened. I'll be fine once they reestablish communication.

SG: Listen, I'm sorry about yesterday, I...

ER: No, it's alright. I was being an ass.

SG: You were.

ER: Rude.

SG: But I wasn't being helpful.

ER: You weren't.

SG: [chuckles]

ER: ...Sally, I know you care about me, but I can handle myself.

SG: I get that you're like okay on the inside with your whole lawful neutral mess, but this time I... I think it's really going to be serious. You're caught up in all this nefarious biz, and then this? I'm sure it's a mistake, but if you realized the error of your ways, or something–

ER: Come on, Sally, do you know how condescending you sound? "Realize the error of my ways?" I am the woman that I am because I make difficult choices.

SG: Yeah, I know...

ER: It's not that I don't see why there are some ethical issues with the actions I have taken and the actions I have authorized. Believe me, I have doubted myself before, and I will do so again, but I don't let my doubt get in the way of my decision-making.

SG: Okay, maybe it's not that, but I'm concerned for you. You're a queer Jewish woman–

ER: –It's still weird that you people describe us like that–

SG: And you're in kind of the most witch hunt-y part of the whole Cold War. There's a play... is it out yet? Eh, doesn't matter. What matters is that the heat is on, and you've got to deal with it. Senator McCarthy–

ER: Senator McCarthy isn't here, it's just our own Ethics Committee. Sure, Lou might not be the most sympathetic, but Bridget knows me, and Chet doesn't want to make trouble, he's on thin ice as it is. I might take some lumps, but to be honest I probably deserve them.

SG: So you do feel the error of your ways?

ER: No, Sally, I don't. I just have the good sense to know that there's always another shoe.

[[SFX: Chet and guards enter]]

ER: And it's right on time.

CW: I'm sorry, Esther, but we're going to move you to house arrest. Dr. Grissom, would you kindly?

SG: Yeah, yeah, I got it.

[[SFX: Sally gets up to leave]]

CW: Sally, I promise that we're all working around the clock to get to the bottom of this.

SG: Are you promising that to me, or her?

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

SG: And just like that, what was supposed to be some kind of quiet ODAR hearing is becoming a grand goddamn rigamarole. They're flying everybody out to DC, they've got a whole lineup of witnesses. They're even bringing in Allen Dulles, Director of Central Fucking Intelligence. They're gonna name an airport after this guy. (Well, maybe it was his brother, who just became Secretary of State, because who ever said the aristocracy was dead...)

Point is, they're pulling out all the stops. We're in peak Red Scare and they're out looking for blood, and all the signs point to Roberts, and... damn. If she wasn't responsible, who was? Sugimura got back from Russia but for the grace of god and Petra, and like, who knows where she came from? The Blackroom is still silent, and they're pinning that on her too. Everything's a mess right now. I don't know how it could get any worse...

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

P1: You tell me, Ken. Looks like we're all off-script today.

KS: I'll tell you everything I can.

SOVIET GUARD: *(on radio)* Что это за прибор? (What's this machine?)

KS: They found a... machine?

P1: Oh god they've got my Timepiece!

KS: They've been waiting for us.

P1: Somebody knew about this mission.

KS: The Soviets were warned.

[[SFX: tape recorder stops]]

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ars PARADOXICA was created by Daniel Manning & Mischa Stanton. This season was also written by Eli Barraza, Julian Mundy, Danielle Shemaiah & Tau Zaman.
Episode 23: Contact features -

Kristen DiMercurio (Sally Grissom)
Katie Speed (Esther Roberts)
Lia Peros (Petra)
Reyn Beeler (Chet Whickman)
Robin Gabrielli (Anthony Partridge)
Isabel Atkinson (Amelia Arnault)
Malcolm Montgomery (Dr. Aldous Carling)
Thomas Isao Morinaka (Kenzo Sugimura)
Briggon Snow (The Contact/Luka)

Translation by Mariya Yanusheva and Molly Phelps. Original music by Mischa Stanton and by Eno Freedman-Brodmann.
ars PARADOXICA is brought to you by The Internet: Twitch streams & dank memes.

26 26 21 06 25 13 26 20 15 11 02 17 14 22 11 07 15 02 08 25
WEATHER:drought
TIME: 5400

24: Dilemma

WRITTEN BY DANIELLE SHEMAIAH
DIRECTED BY DANIELLE SHEMAIAH & MISCHA STANTON
SOUND DESIGN BY MISCHA STANTON

[[SFX: tape recorder starts]]

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA v JULIUS ROSENBERG, ETHEL ROSENBERG, ET AL:
...It is our purpose and object to secure a jury that has no feeling, no bias, no prejudice as to either side of this controversy. To put it another way, the minds of the jurors should be the same as a white sheet of paper with nothing on it, with respect to this case, and you should only take the testimony as it comes from witnesses and from no other source.

[[SFX: radio tuning; a fireplace; Esther's soft footsteps]]

BRIDGET CHAMBERS (BC): Ettie, you're pacing again.

ESTHER ROBERTS (ER): Huh. I never did send this... "Dear JW, I hope you've been well. The weather in Colorado is still pretty unforgiving. My mother always did say I was never meant to live in the countryside. I suppose you and Penny don't have that to worry about, wherever you are-"

[[SFX: Esther crumples up the letter, tosses it into the fire]]

ER: And screw you too.

BC: Oh, honestly, I don't know what that is going to accomplish, other than the awful burning smell.

ER: The prosecution doesn't have our technology. What they do have… is enough kindling to start a fire. And I'd like to think I'm entitled to what little of my private life remains.

BC: [laugh] Ettie, I doubt they're in tune with all of your private life.

ER: Well, you are the expert.

BC: I never said that.

ER: No, my mistake, tell me - where in the Library can I find the Big Book of Government Secrets?

BC: Don't make me the enemy, here. If you'd just take a moment, and focus on anything that might really cast a shadow over your innocence—

ER: Oh, I have no delusions about “shadows cast over my innocence." My being brought to trial isn’t about whether or not I’m a Communist, after all.

BC: Is that what Director Whickman said?

ER: [a dark laugh] Chet said that “Everyone” was working “around the clock” to “get to the bottom of this."

BC: …And you don’t believe him.

ER: Well, there would be a lot of that going around, wouldn’t there.

BC: Ettie–

ER: What, Bridget? Why do you keep saying my name like that? Over and over again? What on earth do you want me to say? I’m being dragged into this farce as some sort of scapegoat, like... Like my contributions to our efforts here mean absolutely nothing. All because someone with a seat in Washington doesn’t believe I could possibly–

BC: Damn it, Esther, would you stop?

ER: Bridget, if I’m going to have to defend myself I need to be able to–

BC: Stop. Ettie. Look at me. Look at me.

ER: [sigh] ...What?

BC: It’s alright to admit that you’re afraid.

ER: I’m not.

BC: Your hands are shaking.

ER: ...I’m a fool.

BC: Well that I won’t argue with.

ER: I’m serious. Every test, every string I’ve pulled, every bent rule and compromise... and I mean as far back as Polvo. Bridget, did you know that we were only fifty miles from the Manhattan demonstrations? And fifty miles in the other direction, Americans were being held in internment camps only a hair’s breadth away from Majdanek! Agent Sugimura’s family was there. Did you know that? And I just kept at it, I–

BC: You couldn’t have known-

ER: No, you aren’t listening! I did know, Bridget. That’s the problem.

BC: ...What is it you aren’t saying? Just tell me. Straight out.

ER: The only thing I can say for certain is that I have no idea what we do here, anymore. I cannot say to any degree of certainty just who I'm working for. Hell, I would perjure myself saying I even knew what we were working towards! And, well, if I don't know... Who does, Bridget? Does Chet? Does the President? Do you?

BC: ...Alright. That's a first.

[[SFX: an authoritative knock at the door; Esther nervously shuffles papers]]

ER: [gasp] Shit…

[[SFX: door opens; Hank and Chet enter]]

HANK CORNISH (HC): Miz Roberts. You're being taken into custody under the direct orders of the Secretary of State, to await trial in lawfully provided quarantine under the rules of the Federal Espionage Act of 1951.

[[SFX: Esther picks up a bag]]

CHET WHICKMAN (CW): Leave that. You won't need it. Miz Chambers.

HC: Follow me, Ms. Roberts.

[[SFX: radio tuning; a crowd mills inside a courtroom; gavel]]

DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE ALLEN DULLES: [clears throat] I suppose we can call all of this to order.

CLERK: The United States in cooperation with the Central Intelligence Agency versus Ms. Esther Roberts. Are both sides prepared?

HC: The prosecution is at your disposal, Your Honor.

CLERK: Mr. Cornish, if you would like to begin.

HC: Ahem. Ladies and Gentlemen gathered here today, we understand that every criminal prosecution, especially those within our own ranks, has grave implications. Not only for the defendants, but for the civil servants and for the people of this great nation. And none more serious than the charges brought before you today: that Ms. Roberts did repeatedly collude and conspire with the Communist party to forward their subversive interests, leading to the untimely assassination of Joseph Stalin by one of her known subordinates. Through these actions Ms. Roberts has plunged our country into uncertainty and made possible the acquisition of certain classified technological materials entrusted to her, which are now available to the Soviets for their own use. The evidence and testimonies presented here in the coming days will prove that the loyalty and allegiance of Ms. Roberts is not to our country, but to Communism, and the advancement of the Communist Agenda throughout the world.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

SALLY GRISSOM (SG): Diary of Sally Grissom, March 3, 1953. To the point. Roberts is… she's in trouble. After the mission went to bunk there were…maybe 12 hours before Cornish and a hangdog-looking Whickman showed up at Roberts' door and took her. The transport out of town was four cars long and completely silent. The lights were enough to wake everyone on our street, though. My neighbor looked like she'd seen a ghost.

So of course I came out to DC with them. What else was I supposed to do? It's one thing to not want to interfere with the future. It's another thing entirely to pretend that you don't know exactly how this plays out for people like her. I…I just can't. Anybody but Roberts.

And maybe that's stupid. Maybe she deserves this and I shouldn't meddle. I'm not saying she shouldn't answer for her actions–I've said that much to her face–but there's a difference between being brought before an Ethics Committee and... this.

I want to say something about positive ions in recirculated air and about how there was this feeling of dread that could be explained away by science. That sinking feeling was undeniably unscientific. It was straight up history, repeating itself. And this is the first time in a while that I've felt like I'm standing in anything close to the textbooks I read in grade school.

It's some seriously scary shit, dude.

Roberts is my friend. She's the best friend I've got around here. Or at least, the best friend I've got that isn't trapped in a timeless void. Anyway whatever Cornish and the rest of the suits have to say, it's…I just don't see a timeline where she's working for the Communists! She might be batshit insane, but if anyone stands to benefit from it, it's the United States of America. Greater good, and all that... Ugh. It's definitely not the fucking Soviets.

Predictive Mechanics would be pretty helpful right about now. I don't know where we go from here. There's no way this trial happens in a history without me in it. I feel like we're going off script, like we've scrubbed through to the end of an old VHS and somehow the tape is still running? You keep waiting for something else to appear – something you recorded over a long time ago and forgot about, but it's just those lines, and a screen that's not quite black… We could rewind it, but, mostly there's that niggling curiosity about…what's at the end of this thing? If I keep going, what… y'know? The minute they took her we just… I don't know, it felt like time froze. Timelines converged, everyone ground to a halt. I mean, that's not how time travel works, I'm just saying that's what it felt like. You know what I mean.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

BAILIFF: Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God?

ER: I do so swear.

DULLES: Your witness, Prosecutor.

HC: Good Morning, Esther.

ER: Hank.

HC: The sooner we start, the sooner this will all be over.

ER: That is how time works. I'm something of an expert.

HC: Certainly... Why don't we start there, then? Walk us through how you joined ODAR.You began in research and development, correct?

ER: I was shoved into a Computing basement when I first began, but yes. I was stationed at the Polvo Research Community for two years.

HC: And then you were part of the relocation to Point-of-Exile, Colorado in 1946?

ER: Do I really have to answer that? You were there.

HC: For the record and for the Committee, Ms. Roberts, I ask that you be detailed and specific.

ER: Yes, I was moved to Point-of-Exile in January 1946, where I continued to fine-tune the Timepiece project with reduced resources.

HC: The Timepiece was the only thing you worked on?

ER: In my official capacity, yes.

HC: So you weren't involved with the CAGE project?

ER: I… Well, I mean, it's the same device, really--

HC: Answer the question, Ms. Roberts.

ER: Yes, I worked on a number of Timepiece derivatives.

HC: In point of fact, you were one of the first test subjects for the CAGE project, is that right? You spent a relative 24 hours inside it with Mr. Chet Whickman?

ER: Uh, I-

HC: And isn't it true that upon exiting the CAGE, you then proceeded to enact a plan made by you and Mr. Whickman to wrest power of ODAR from William Donovan?

ER: ...His health was in severe decline, a succession plan had to be put in place–

HC: Did you or did you not conspire to take control of ODAR from its director and your superior officer?

[[SFX: crowd murmurs]]

ER: You're really not pulling any punches, are you Hank?

HC: Ms. Roberts, we're only just getting started.

[[SFX: radio tuning; outside the courthouse; Petra approaches]]

SG: Hey kid, what kept you?

PETRA (P): Took me a second to slip my handler. What, um... What did I miss?

SG: Not much. Tense in there. Deciding whether or not we're going to be allowed to sit in on the important bits at all.

P: It's because they want me to testify, isn't it?

SG: Wait, what? You're not on the witness list...

P: It was redacted. Apparently my existence is a higher level of state secret than ODAR and the Timepiece? They're gonna clear the room of nonessential personnel during my testimony.

SG: ...Well Jesus, what am I, chopped liver? Have you thought about what you wanna say?

P: I think they just wanna know what my impressions of her are. Her signature is on my ID forms, after all, even if she hasn't signed them yet.

SG: If that's the case, why wouldn't they call me? I've known her longer than you have, I've got years of potential Roberts dirt.

P: Well, that's the point, isn't it? They probably think you're biased. Which, let's be fair here, Sally, you kind of are, I mean–

SG: –I've been on both sides of it. She's my friend, but… I dunno. But still, have you seen the witness list? It's not even just you. Griggs, Whickman, one of her neighbors from Polvo... they're beating the weeds on this one. And Jesus, after everything Roberts has been through already, I'm not surprised to see her rattled.

P: That's... not what I mean. At all. Look, I know she's your friend, and you're everyone's hero, and whatever, but you weren't over there. You didn't see what happened. Don't you think the fact that Esther is being

investigated is cause for, I don't know, concern rather than outright relief? I mean, how can we be so sure we're on the right side?

SG: ...You're gonna testify against her, aren't you.

P: No – Yes, I – I don't know. I just think that it's probably for the best that I tell the truth. About everything. That's what Carm would have done.

SG: And where will that lead the Committee?

P: ...How should I know?

[[SFX: Bridget and Lou approach]]

BC: You know, if we're handing out accusations of espionage and collusion based on looks alone, two sore thumb loners standing just outside a courtroom whispering amongst themselves doesn't exactly leave the pair of you smelling like roses.

P: The gang really is all here.

LOU GAINES (LG): Looks that way.

P: I'll see you all inside.

[[SFX: Petra ascends the courthouse steps and goes inside]]

BC: Something we said?

SG: She's just nervous about testifying.

BC: And what about you?

SG: What, am I nervous about Petra testifying? ….Yeah. Kinda.

BC: Comforting.

LG: You know what you're gonna say up there?

BC: Spare me a smoke and I might tell you.

LG: Didn't know you smoked.

BC: I don't make a practice of it.

[[SFX: Lou digs through his pockets for a cigarette and a lighter; he lights Bridget's cigarette]]

BC: Well, whatever there is to say, I'm obviously not here to see her walked out in chains.

SG: This entire thing is a clusterfuck. It's good that you came, though. To speak up for her.

BC: ...I didn't say that.

SG: What do you mean?

LG: She's not sure she's going to testify at all. That's why you didn't-

BC: Lou, please.

SG: No. No! Chambers, what the heck? You're one of Roberts' oldest and... best friends-

BC: Ettie disappeared for years, Sally. I know now what she was doing for at least part of that time, but I won't perjure myself to say we stayed in contact, and I know the rest.

SG: So you're drinking the Kool-Aid now, too?

BC: What is that supposed to mean?

SG: You're buying into this lunacy! You're one of the few people who can actually speak to her character, and you're just rolling over?

BC: And what about you?

SG: Not the world's most reliable source at this point, am I? Whickman's obviously off the table, and Wyatt's in the wind... This isn't about you! It's no time to be selfish about-

BC: I didn't say that I wouldn't testify... What I meant, was that it's complicated. You know why it's complicated.

SG: It's not like you have to say-

BC: Don't.

SG: Don't what?

BC: You know exactly what, Sally Grissom, and I'll thank you to keep your voice down. You have absolutely no idea what you're saying. Whom you're defending. You don't live inside my head and, in the words of one June Barlowe, you are not always the smartest person in the room, despite an overwhelming belief to the contrary.

SG: ...You're a coward, Chambers.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

ER: We were at MIT together, and then we worked together at ODAR. He was my lab partner.

HC: Would you say Jack's opinion was one that you held in high regard?

ER: I'm not sure where you're going with this.

DULLES: It's not your job to understand why the prosecution is asking you what he's asking you, Ms. Roberts. It's your job to answer him, to the best of your ability.

ER: [sigh] Yes. Jack was a well respected engineer in his field, he was smart and did good work, and I trusted him with my life and safety on a daily basis.

HC: He'd say the same about you?

ER: You'd have to ask him about that.

HC: Gentlemen of the Committee, if you will turn to page 4b of your evidence packets, you'll find an excerpt from the file of one Mr. Jack Wyatt. He has been AWOL, considered missing, for nearly a decade now. And in his last communication with ODAR facilities, on the night of December 25th, 1946, you said (and I'm quoting the transcript here), Wyatt: "If they think they can use you to bring me back in, they're dead wrong." Roberts: "I wouldn't let them… I owe it to you. I told them you were headed east… I want you to be free of all this. You of all people deserve it." Does this ring any bells for you, Ms. Roberts?

[[SFX: Esther is silent]]

HC: How about the surveillance tape obtained via portable recording device from that night, where Jack Wyatt's destination was hard-scrubbed from the record?

[[SFX: Esther is silent]]

HC: Ms. Roberts, were you aware that Jack Wyatt was under breach of contract with the US government when he fled Point-of-Exile? That because we were unable to properly debrief him, we have no way of knowing what secrets he may have taken with him–

ER: He didn't take anything!

HC: As you said, Ms. Roberts, we'd have to ask him.

[[SFX: radio tuning; gavel, a recess; the crowd mills about outside the courtroom]]

SG: I'm gonna try to track down a vending machine or something. You want anything?

BC: A vending machine? In a… government building?

SG: Never hurts to try. I'll catch you inside.

HC: Ah, Ms. Chambers, a moment?

[[SFX: Sally exits; Hank approaches]]

HC: Good Morning, Bridget. I'm glad you could make it. I hope you're well.

BC: I wasn't aware that attendance was voluntary, but good morning all the same, Mr. Cornish.

HC: I don't think any of us wants to be here any longer than we have to. I know I'm running this into the ground, but I really do want to get to the bottom of this, whatever that truth may be.

BC: Glad to hear it.

HC: Have you given any thought to your testimony?

BC: With regard to...?

HC: Well I know you've been "in the fold," shall we say, for a few years now, is it? But there is a… discrepancy regarding the timeline of your recruitment.

BC: A discrepancy?

HC: Well, there is a question about how you two reunited after so many years apart?

BC: She was an old college friend who'd been out of touch. She told me she was in town, and I met her at a bar.

HC: You two talked the whole evening away at that bar?

BC: I can't say I remember.

HC: [laugh] Well, you'd remember if you exchanged any classified information, government secrets, anything like that, so I guess it really doesn't matter.

BC: Obviously not my area of interest, unless you all are hiding the Library of Alexandria or the Dead Sea Scrolls in your archives, somewhere, and I know I haven't heard anything about that. You are aware I'm essentially a librarian, right?

HC: I'll bet you had no idea what you were stumbling into when you saw your old college friend again, did you?

BC: I can't say I know that much more now, Mr. Cornish.

HC: So Esther never mentioned to you what she did? Not even in passing?

BC: Again, this was quite some time ago, and a lot has happened since then, I can't say I remember what we spoke about.

HC: You don't remember the night at all?

BC: Of course I remember the night–

HC: But you don't remember what you talked about. That's strange, isn't it? Especially since we know you visited Point-of-Exile, only weeks before the security breach at the ODAR prison facility? What was it, Ms. Chambers? Family nearby?

BC: ...Well am I under oath, Mr. Prosecutor?

HC: It's only fair, since I asked you here, that you be prepared for some of the things that you might be asked on the stand.

BC: You're too kind.

HC: Of course, Mrs. Chambers. I'll see you inside.

[[SFX: Hank walks away; radio tuning]]

DULLES: Director Chester Nathaniel Whickman the Second, do you swear under oath to be truthful in your responses to the best of your ability, as you did so swear in taking your oath to serve and protect these United States of America during your time in the Armed Forces?

CW: Yes Sir.

DULLES: Well alright, then. Let's get down to it.

[[SFX: Chet sits]]

Dulles: Now, we already have a prepared, written statement from you (you all can find that in your evidence packets if you have not already perused it), so we really are just here to get some clarity, as I said, for the record. So. Mr. Whickman.

CW: Chairman Dulles.

DULLES: What was your initial impression of Ms. Roberts as relates to the Office of Developed Anomalous Resources?

CW: Esther Roberts has been an integral part of every step of our organization, almost since the beginning. She's a brilliant mind, sir. Undisputably.

DULLES: Do you think of her as a trustworthy individual, Whickman? Is she someone that you can put your faith in, as a commanding officer?

CW: Absolutely, sir. I'd have never made Esther Roberts Head of Research and Development if I didn't think her not only qualified, but dedicated to the duties that the position would come to demand of her.

DULLES: And how would you say that Esther measured up to those expectations?

CW: I'd say she met and exceeded them, sir.

DULLES: Were you ever given any reason to believe that your trust in Ms. Roberts might have been betrayed? Or that your initial assessment of trustworthiness may have been misplaced?

CW: When do you mean, sir?

DULLES: Hm. Well, that certainly is one way to answer the question, I'd say. That's a good question, Chet. When would you say is the first time you had reason to question Esther Roberts?

CW: Listen, sir, if I'm being honest, I question everyone. Everything, all the time. It's a part of my job. I keep informed.

DULLES: Fine. It is evident as we sit here today that the woman before this court is not the one you entrusted to be your second in command when you took office. So: what changed?

CW: [sigh] Esther Roberts and I had our fair share of disagreements, that much is well documented. I stand by my statement that she has the mind of a visionary. She was a civilian scientist, The way she did things was never going to be completely in line with my training in the Armed Forces and the work we do here at ODAR. I'm not here to sound an alarm on Esther Roberts because we butted heads. I respect her, though I may have missed the mark when it comes to making it apparent in our day to days. When I say I trusted Esther Roberts, I absolutely mean it.

DULLES: It sounds like you're coming up on a "but" there, Whickman.

CW: Trusting your team...sometimes means taking it on faith that they're doing what's best for all of you in the moment, and not asking those questions even if they're biting at the back of your brain like ants on an old apple core. And y'know, the things you'll see there written in the testimony are just... There were times when I had questions, you know? It wasn't like I never had any doubts. I just chose to believe we were on the right track. Now, looking back...

DULLES: ...You're not so sure.

CW: I'm saying that there are blank spots. Gaps I wish I'd had filled in. That I take full responsibility for. And I don't know what they all have to do with each other, I've admitted as much. But I do know that what they've all got in common–and I'm sorry about this, genuinely–is Esther Roberts.

DULLES: Please, Mr. Whickman, can you be specific?

CW: Of course. Well, for one, it was never clear to me why she paired the two prison cells that were breached the night of the prison incident. In the end, that countermeasure did more to get the both of them out that night-

[[SFX: Dulles flips through his packet]]

DULLES: I believe Ms Roberts was injured that night, correct?

CW: She was. But that never sat right with me, either. And... I'm sorry, Esther, but I have to admit it did occur to me that yes, it'd be a convenient way to make sure no eyes came drifting back over to you when it was time to place the blame.

It'd be nothing if that were the first time, but... Why did you insist on going to New York yourself when we had that supply issue? And why'd you need to take Sally with you? She wasn't working for us at the time, and she came back with a hostile who went directly for our equipment. She just... walked him through the door. She never would have been in a position to do that, were it not for you.

Hell, if you knew what Donovan was doing, why didn't you say something? Why didn't you stop it, Esther? Huh? And why'd you let that damn machine spin up that day after I'd told you all to stop those tests? Did you know I'd get stuck in there with you? Once we're asking all these questions, what's to stop me from believing that you didn't have that planned, that you knew exactly what to say and what not to say to get me on your side by the time we made it out of the CAGE?

[[SFX: Esther stands]]

ER: Chet, how the hell would I-

DULLES: You'll speak when addressed by the court, Ms. Roberts!

[[SFX: Esther sits]]

DULLES: Please continue.

CW: I... I can't get my head around how you add up all those zeroes and come up with anything other than a question. We used to have a way to hedge our bets on this kind of uncertainty, but the Blackroom went dark on the day of the assassination! And then the Soviets recovered our Timepiece, and... I tried to take your word, Esther, but… I just don't know.

DULLES: Would you say, given the events you have brought to light here and in your written testimony, that you stand by the statement made earlier today, that you totally, without reservation, trust Ms. Esther Roberts in the position to which she's been appointed?

CW: Not without reservation. No.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

P: Marquez.

HC: Excuse me?

P: Petra Marquez.

[[SFX: Hank searches through his paperwork]]

HC: That's not your legal name, is it?

P: Well, Hank, you're about to start questioning me, and I've been sitting here this whole time watching this go down, so I figure what's about to happen is: You make a big deal out of my name, even though you've known me for years and know I don't have a last name. I respond, you snowball the fact into an emotional sob story–

HC: Objection, witness is making presumptuous accusations–Petra, can we stick to answering the questions?

P: Well, stop me when you hear something wrong! Sob story about the inhumanity of my not knowing my parents, growing up the way I did, having everything including my name taken away from me when I was barely out of diapers. But I'm not a character witness, Agent Cornish, I'm evidence. And as well as I know that? I'm not going to sit here and let you call me "Miz-Twenty-Nine" for the next four hours. And there's plenty real issues to talk about without digging in on the "Little Orphan Annie" angle. So yeah. Petra Marquez. It's the name I've chosen for myself. If the court doesn't mind.

DULLES: Proceed, Mr. Cornish.

HC: Fine. Miss Marquez, since you're so far ahead of the rest of us, why don't you start by telling us where you're from, and how you found yourself under the employ of Ms. Roberts.

P: [sigh] I was raised as part of an experiment to improve neuroplasticity and raise tolerance to the damaging effects of repeated manipulation of causal events. AKA Butterfly Syndrome.

HC: And when you finally made it back to your arrival point, and you encountered the defendant Ms. Roberts for the very first time, did she tell you what your job description was? What you and the remaining members of your program would be doing while there, and working for ODAR?

P: Our job was to survive. To make it to the end point. That was all.

HC: Why?

P: So they'd understand how Butterfly Syndrome worked, and could figure out how to beat it.

HC: I see. How'd your classmates die, exactly, Miss Marquez?

P: Colorful and varied ways. You're gonna have to be more specific than that.

HC: How did Liam Seventeen die, Ms Marquez?

P: ...Complications from a stroke.

HC: Related to Butterfly Syndrome?

P: I wasn't allowed to see the report–

HC: Page 47c of the evidence packet. According to that report, Liam was no older than 15. How did watching your friend die affect you emotionally, Petra?

P: Probably a lot, I'm not a shrink.

HC: Have you ever seen one?

P: Have you?

DULLES: Miss Marquez, please.

HC: Gentlemen of the committee, if you will turn with me to the back of your evidence packets, you'll find the files pertaining to these experiments, authorized by Esther Roberts and her subordinates. I once again ask the court's understanding, as these documents are dated far into our future. Is that consistent with what you know to be true, Petr–Miz Marquez?

P: I guess, technically?

DULLES: It either is or it isn't, young lady.

P: That's... Alright. I was born in 19[redacted]. The papers from that year, before our first jump, have Esther's name on them, yeah, but that isn't... why are you making me explain this? It's Esther, but it isn't *this* Esther, because it hasn't happened yet, and now that she knows she can choose a different path! It's my past, but it's not yours.

HC: You make an excellent point, Miss Marquez. But it remains your past. You know her, in a way no one else in the world possibly could.

P: Except for Carmen–

HC: Yes, and if she hadn't been allowed to leave ODAR, never to be heard from again, I'd have her on the stand too! Now then. Your arrival at the end of the experiment was the first time Esther Roberts met you, but it wasn't the first time you'd met her, isn't that right? You knew she was behind the experiment even before she did?

P: Yes.

HC: Would you say you resented Ms. Roberts for her part in your... well, shall we say mandatory participation in the experiment?

P: You could say that, yes.

HC: Why? If she hadn't signed off on your experiment yet, if she was capable of making different choices with the information gained by your arrival, why did you harbor such resentment toward her? Enough so that you abdicated your position at ODAR–

P: Uh, am I on trial here?

HC: Not today, Ms. Marquez, you'll get your turn. But I have to know: if Esther never made the choice, why didn't you trust her?

P: Because… Because I had met her before. I've seen what ODAR becomes, with her at the wheel. More than I was cleared to know, that's for damn sure. And when I got there, to that end point, and I saw the youngest Esther Roberts I'd ever met… Just because she didn't sign the papers, doesn't mean she isn't the kind of person who would.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

SG: [sigh] That's where we are, now. Petra was Cornish's last witness, but she was just the cherry on top of a mountain of evidence. They have brought in every big hitter they could, uncovered every red mark in her ledger, and the worst part of it is that I can't say anything Cornish has said is entirely outside of the realm of possibility. Damn, even I'm saying it now.

If the gravity of this whole mess wasn't clear to you before, it should be now. Whatever she's actually done, this isn't... You can't be okay with this, Partridge! I mean, I get it. You're caught up in this too, you disagree. Partridge, she doesn't deserve this. I know she's not your favorite, but now would be a really great time to step in if you've got... really, literally, anything.

[[SFX: the crowd returns inside]]

LG: Sally, you may want to come inside.

SG: Okay... I gotta get back. Come on. Say something. Please.

[[SFX: no reply; Sally hangs up; radio tuning]]

HC: You're a Jew, aren't you, Esther?

ER: Yes.

HC: Are there a lot of Jews in Point-of-Exile, Colorado?

ER: I wouldn't know. We don't all know one another.

HC: Fair enough. Is there some kind of synagogue or temple, a place of worship that you go to?

ER: No.

HC: Why not?

ER: Since 1946 I've occupied a rather demanding position. Unfortunately, I tend to work on the Sabbath.

HC: Isn't that against one of your commandments?

ER: You're a Christian Man, are you not, Hank? They're your commandments too, I'm pretty sure.

HC: Hey, let's get through this together, hm? We're almost done here. Eyes up.

[[SFX: Hank takes a drink of water; Esther rolls her eyes]]

HC: You pray often, Ms. Roberts?

ER: What does this have to do with–

HC: Just answer the question.

ER: Sometimes.

HC: So, you don't attend synagogue–

ER: I work on Saturdays! I work for the United States government on Saturdays–

HC: –and you pray "sometimes," you say. We have limited records on your contact with your family, and nothing on your involvement in any religious groups, institutions, anything like that for almost all of you tenure, it looks like.

ER: Is this a bad thing?

HC: It made you a pretty good candidate at the time of your hiring, I can say that. You're your own, Esther Roberts, through and through, that's for sure.

But if you don't mind my asking–and I don't mean this to sound rude–what kind of Jew does that make you?

[[SFX: silence]]

ER: A living one, Mr. Cornish.

[[SFX: awkward silence; Dulles clears his throat uncomfortably]]

ER: I'm an American, Hank. I was born here, I've spent my entire life here. Everyone that I know and care about is here.

HC: So you'd say you don't see yourself as a Jew at all.

ER: The two are not mutually exclusive! I did not say that.

HC: If you were forced to put them in an order–

ER: Are we here to interrogate my status as an American woman, or my status as a Jew, Hank? How about *you* put them in an order, and then maybe we can get somewhere?

HC: I'm... taken aback, Ms. Roberts. There is no need for that sort of tone.

ER: No? You think I haven't heard this line of questioning before? "Am I a Jew, or am I an American"–is this the horse upon which you wish to mount your prosecution, Mr. Cornish? Is she "Jewish enough" to harbor resentment about our country's handling of the Holocaust? American enough to set aside her personal beliefs for Truth, Justice, and the American Way? Is that the freedom our government works so hard to ensure? Freedom to be shoved into a choice between my blood and my beliefs? Do you think you're the first man who looks the way you do, to stand before a court and demand that answer from someone who looks the way I do? Because you aren't. Burn me to the ground if you wish, but at least have the stones to be explicit about why. I'm not here to plead the case of my humanity. I won't. Next fucking question.

HC: Since it may enlighten you beyond your vast but still yet limited perspective for my doing so, Ms. Roberts, I will tell you that my purpose here is to ascertain your allegiances. If you don't attend prayer services, and you've shut yourself off from your community, and you left home and family at the first chance you got, and your closest friend fled your side under cover of night, and you have perverted–

DULLES: Cornish–

HC: –perverted the power and purpose of the United States Government without oversight to pursue hidden agendas, and you've lost faith in God Himself, I am trying to figure out, Ms. Roberts, who you serve!

[[SFX: the crowd mumurs wildly]]

HC: No further questions, Mr. Chairman.

[[SFX: radio tuning; faucet running]]

BAILIFF: *(outside the door)* Excuse me–

BC: *(outside the door)* You won't keep me from using the facilities, unless you've somehow managed to manifest another ladies' room somewhere closer to the proceedings.

BAILIFF: *(outside the door)* ...Sure. Go ahead.

BC: *(outside the door)* I thought not.

[[SFX: Esther turns off the faucet; Bridget enters]]

BC: Ettie?

ER: ...Hi.

BC: Oh, Esther…

[[SFX: they embrace; Esther sobs]]

BC: Are you alright?

ER: I don't know anymore... I don't know anything anymore. My head's spinning.

BC: Oh, honey, look at you…

ER: I'm fine, I'm fine. Bridget, you have to know–

BC: Shh, I know. I do. I promise I do.

ER: They're asking about my family, Bridget. What does my mother have to do with any of this? Even if I were... what they said I am, what do my Dad, and my sister have to...

BC: Nothing, Ettie. Nothing at all.

[[SFX: Esther cries; Bailiff knocks]]

BAILIFF: Hey ma'am, are you done in there? It's time to get back.

ER: Bridget, I've got to ask you something –

BC: Esther?

ER: ...Reconsider?

BC: What, running away together? After all this time?

ER: Not that. Don't think I haven't thought about it... You've seen enough of this to know what's going to happen at the end of it, you keep up with the newspapers. I know you have your reservations but... I don't know if there's a way out of this for me if you don't say something, Bridget. The deck is pretty stacked against me.

BC: A real dilemma. [laugh]

ER: [laugh] I'm serious.

BC: Ettie... I don't know if I can.

ER: I wouldn't ask if I thought there were other options.

BC: Wouldn't you?

ER: Bridget, you know me. Better than I'd like. Maybe I am all of those awful things you think I am but you know I'm not a... you've been to my home, for heaven's sake! You've met my parents, you've met my sister! You know everything there is to know about ODAR at this point Bridget, you know–

BC: I know your heart, Esther. I do. And I-believe me, I've been fighting myself on this since the moment they took you away in the middle of the night. But Ettie, if I swear under oath, and I tell the truth, the whole truth about you…

ER: ...You think they'd lock me up and throw away the key. [long sigh] I know how this looks. I refuse to pity myself, I just thought–

BC: You can't give up, Esther.

ER: I have no intention to. That's... I'm not giving up, but… Look. If you won't speak, please, do something for me?

[[SFX: Esther takes out an envelope]]

BC: What is-

ER: I need you to give this to my mother, if I don't see her again. Knock on the door, their house is the same. The next time you're in the City. My sister will answer the door, but don't let her read it. It's for my mother's eyes only. Can you… please?

BC: Esther, I don't think this is–

[[SFX: Bailiff knocks]]

BAILIFF: *(outside the door)* Ma'am, I need to insist. You need to come out right now.

ER: Bridget, please. Promise me.

BC: Esther, what does this say?

ER: ...It's a letter for my mother, Bridget, what–

BC: I've never known you to write letters in Yiddish.

ER: My Mother's reading is stronger in–

BC: Esther Roberts, what is in my hands? The truth. There's no one here but me. What does this say?

ER: ...Don't take it, then.

[[SFX: Esther grabs the letter; the two women struggle over it]]

BC: No! Read it to me.

ER: ...I'm not going to do that, Bridget.

BC: Esther, I can't–

[[SFX: Bailiff knocks]]

BAILIFF: *(outside the door)* Ma'am, you've got five seconds or I'm coming in there, ladies' room or not!

ER: I'm coming! Wait a few minutes before you follow me out. Fucking Cornish…

[[SFX: Esther exits; radio tuning]]

HC: Ladies and gentlemen, Chairman Dulles, members of the Committee. We as representatives of the American people, decided to go where no one had dared to before. Daring to do so only on the understanding that a trust had been struck between the United States, and the agency tasked with the research and development of this new technology. "God Forbid," we said to ourselves, "this technology be replicated or created by a country less moral than our own!" Our deepest fears, I fear, have now been realized, because of Ms. Roberts' actions and temperament in a position of unprecedented power in our nation, as we have proven in this court. I respectfully submit to the Committee that this betrayal cannot be overlooked or undersold, and advocate not only for the removal of Ms. Roberts from her position and her immediate termination, but for the disbanding of the gaping wound of an agency called the Office of Developed Anomalous Resources as a whole.

CW: Now wait just a minute there–

HC: You had your chance to speak, Director Whickman–

CW: Now I never said–!

DULLES: That's enough, Mr. Cornish. Director Whickman. I've heard–

HC: If you'll pardon my–

[[SFX: gavel; a commotion, which then settles]]

DULLES: I said, I've heard enough! Ms. Roberts. Understanding the allegations we have been put forth here by Mr. Cornish, and the findings through evidence and witness testimony presented in this trial... Do you have anything to say for yourself?

[[SFX: silence; tape recorder stop]]

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ars PARADOXICA was created by Daniel Manning & Mischa Stanton. This season was also written by Eli Barraza, Julian Mundy, Danielle Shemaiah & Tau Zaman.
Episode 24: Dilemma features –

Kristen DiMercurio (Sally Grissom)
Katie Speed (Esther Roberts)
Lia Peros (Petra)
L. Jeffrey Moore (Lou Gaines)
Preston Allen (Bridget Chambers)
Reyn Beeler (Chet Whickman)
Dan Anderson (Hank Cornish)
Todd Faulkner (Allen Dulles)
Alexander Danner, Donna Semel*, Dennis Connors (additional voices)
with special thanks to Isabel Atkinson

Original music by Mischa Stanton and by Eno Freedman-Brodmann.

ars Paradoxica is brought to you by The Internet: [[SFX: Law & Order sound]]

08 02 28 19 22 28 09 12 11 18 19 16 31 20 40 25 30 41 25 30 38 38 33 28 38 47
WEATHER: arid
MARKETS: rising

25: Absence

WRITTEN BY JULIAN MUNDY
DIRECTED & SOUND DESIGN BY MISCHA STANTON

[[SFX: tape recorder starts; a diner]]

PETRA MARQUEZ (PM): So, um...

BRIDGET CHAMBERS (BC): What is it, Petra?

PM: I don't really... No, never mind. I guess I'm wondering what happens next.

BC: She was convicted by a military tribunal. They'll do what soldiers do, now is simply a question of when.

PM: And how, I guess. Sorry.

BC: It's fine. I'm not mad at you. It's hard to describe how I feel.

PM: I get you. [pause] Sally?

SALLY GRISSOM (SG): Yeah? Sorry, Petra, were you saying something?

PM: You're being really quiet. Still here with us earthlings?

SG: Yeah... Yeah, just processing.

PM: Talk to us. You knew her the longest.

SG: I thought Bridget...

BC: No, just a couple of years in school. My history with Ettie goes back the furthest, but you worked with her for almost a decade. You would know best if she... No. That isn't fair, putting that on you.

SG: It's okay, Chambers. It's natural.

BC: I have all these doubts. And then the very next moment, I scold myself for having them. Maybe a part of me envies your perspective, Sally.

SG: Roberts and I were friends... are friends, but part of that friendship was respecting that we couldn't tell each other certain things. You just don't talk about some things, because they're classified, or redacted. But then, the not-asking and not-telling becomes a reflex, and you miss chances to talk about the things that matter. I don't even know what her parents are like, or how many siblings she has. I just know that weird card game.

BC: She never spoke much about her family. Her parents worked hard to put Ettie through college, they were so proud. She has a younger sister by a few years... maybe the single person I ever saw who wasn't intimidated or, I don't know, "wrong-footed" by Ettie. I remember she was a hugger. Ettie is... not. Wait, Sally, did you say she tried to teach you Dilemma?

SG: Excuse me, she taught me Dilemma, then I taught her how to teach Dilemma. She tends to over-explain.

BC: ...Thank you, Sally.

SG: For what?

BC: For being her friend. I worried she might not make any more after we lost touch.

SG: Hey, sure, I mean... You're welcome, I guess. I can't say how well it worked out for her.

PM: Sally, don't–

[[SFX: a plate breaks; someone laughs, then a few people clap]]

SG: ...You know what? Eff this.

BC: ...Eff? What?

PM: What are we effing?

SG: None of this fits, right? That kangaroo court we sat through? They're just doing what they think is damage control while they wait for the other shoe to drop.

PM: So what are you suggesting?

SG: The verdict was passed down by a panel of gun jockeys, most of whom barely had the clearance to look at the evidence. They don't have ODAR registry access, but there are three ladies at this table who do... And then there's our good friend, Mr. Gaines...

PM: This is a migraine waiting to happen. You want us to retrace her steps, going back years? Come on, half of what we find is gonna be blacked out.

BC: I know there's no love lost for you about Esther, but if she isn't to blame for this mess, the real culprit still gets to move around as they please! Tell us that doesn't make you a little uneasy.

Petra: ...Ugh. Fine. I hate homework.

[[SFX: Sally stands]]

SG: Ladies, it sounds like we have a plan. I gotta go make some calls.

CHET WHICKMAN (CW): This isn't exactly what I had in mind when I took your meeting, Sally. I don't like being ambushed in my own office. No offense, Lou.

LOU GAINES (LG): I have a research background, and I have a thorough grounding in the movements of Esther Roberts after the war ended.

CW: What you call "thorough" is incomplete, at best! You were a civilian when you were came looking for Mr. Marian.

LG: Which is why we need priority access to the registry archives. Agent Chambers and I will be coordinating the search, Petra and Dr. Grissom will assist with cataloguing and analysis.

CW: –In a misguided effort to exonerate a woman who's already been tried and convicted of treason and espionage. God help me, I can't believe I'm back at this place with you.

SG: Hasn't it occurred to you that this is all happening a little too quickly? Whickman, there is still a guy with a Timepiece out there. We know next to nothing about him, other than he had help from our guy, Marian. That doesn't rustle your jimmies at all?

CW: I can't conduct a formal investigation into the activities of Esther Roberts in the wake of her sentencing. I testified. I have to stand by what I said in that room, or...

SG: Or what? Whickman, what's going on?

CW: I have no more favors to call in, Sally. I'm holding onto this organization with my fingernails. If I look like I'm waffling, they could replace me in a matter of weeks. I can't let that happen.

LG: You hired Agent Chambers and myself to help you steer this ship when it goes off course, so that's what we'll be doing. We'll simply have to look at Roberts' movements as part of the larger issue, that being the missing Timepiece.

SG: We can pin the bastard. Chet.

[[SFX: the clock strikes four]]

CW: This stays under our roof, you understand? Keep it quiet, and try to keep personal feeling out of your conclusions. You'll need hard evidence of the mole to point to.

SG: Chambers and Petra are down below, working on it as we speak.

CW: [sigh]

LG: If it's there, we'll find it. Then you can make good on your promise, Mr. Whickman, and focus on finding David.

CW: Make it fast.

BC: You put all this together yourself?

LG: This is the meat of what I could find on Esther Roberts. She took part in a few engineering consultations in the years following the war. There was a period where she took several short absences to meet with various think tanks. It looks like she was subcontracting certain projects, but I wouldn't recognize the code names. Not much press attention overall. ODAR seemed to take up most of her hours, which gives us plenty to sift through in the archive.

PM: I volunteer to lift and carry things. This stuff makes me go cross-eyed.

[[SFX: Lou hands out files]]

LG: Crossed eyes are still a pair of eyes. We need every one we can get, so pace yourselves. This likely won't get done in a night or a week. Burning out is a real possibility. Like I tell my students: keep yourself alive first. Everything else comes after.

PM: Yeah, yeah, I hear you.

SG: It's not like this is the hardest thing we ever did. We're just...

PM: Trying to overturn a guilty verdict on a woman convicted of high crimes against the state, by rooting through a bunch of papers to find a mole who may or may not exist in real life. No, I get you, I'm right there with ya.

BC: You're restless.

PM: I'll try to get a grip on it.

BC: We understand, sweetheart. Or maybe it would be better to say: we know where it's coming from. We just have to keep our eyes clear, or...

PM: We probably fail. I know.

SG: If I still could get in touch with Patridge, maybe I could fill in some... shit. Nevermind.

PM: What do you mean? Anthony Partridge?

[[SFX: the record player turns off]]

SG: Forget I said anything, really. Just a bit of tinkering that... isn't working. Right now.

PM: Have you been talking to him?

SG: Not... for quite a while. How do you even know about–?

PM: Are you telling me you have a direct line to the Blackroom, Sally?

SG: No! In fact, that is exactly what I'm telling you I don't have!

LG: You're talking about the dispatch unit ODAR lost contact with?

PM: Yes. // **SG:** No!

BC: ...What does this mean?

SG: It means nothing! If the Blackroom isn't responding, it's something on his side, and it won't matter what kind of hotline I may or may not have!

PM: Jesus. How long have you had it?

SG: A couple years. It's not like I can hold a heated conversation, there's some lag time between messages, but... Since I heard about what happened on your mission, I sent a few messages rapid-fire. No response yet. I wanted to help out, but I didn't think telling you before I knew anything would–

PM: But you've been talking for a couple of years, you said. Could you have said something that made him break contact? Did you talk to him before my mission?

LG: Petra. Just hang on a second, all right? She isn't to blame for what happened to you out there, but we'll find the one who is.

PM: It isn't about me... I'm sorry, you're right. My bad, Sally.

SG: It's fine, really. I get it.

BC: Let's just keep going then. Anyone for coffee?

[[SFX: radio tuning; outside of Lou's place]]

SG: Don't go and buy yourself a pack of cigarettes, Sally. I don't care what kind of day you've had, you don't get to start now.

[[SFX: Petra approaches]]

PM: Talking to yourself, huh? That's cool. I know how that is.

SG: Oh. Yeah, I guess so.

PM: I'm sorry. I got pretty intense up there.

SG: No, it's fine, you don't have to–

PM: But that's only because I know the kinds of things you can do. I have ODAR history to guide me. None of them know what you're capable of, not really. When you mentioned Partridge, I thought: "If anyone could make him shut down the Blackroom, it's her."

SG: You've got me at a disadvantage, too. You know some things I haven't done yet.

PM: We're only here now because you did the impossible. Can I ask you to try to do it again?

SG: You want me to keep trying to contact Partridge?

PM: Yes. Please.

SG: Okay. Okay, I will. I'll keep you posted.

PM: Thank you. I'll see you later.

SG: Yeah, you bet. Sleep well.

PM: And Sally? If we do find out later that you had something to do with that man dying in Russia, I think we'd both wish you had just told me now.

[[SFX: silence in the night; Petra walks away; radio tuning]]

SG:

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

SG: Goddammit, Partridge, would you pick up your phone and tell me what's going on? I'd settle for an "eff-you" if it means I get some proof of life. I don't like imagining you crushed under a pile of canned peaches and beans and shit, okay? Stop goofing around with your stupid rubber band ball or whatever and call me back. You ass.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

SG: Partridge, it's me again. I'm just going to keep calling until I hear back, so if this is supposed to be some kind of elaborate punishment you devised, it's only gonna backfire. You know you can't out-stubborn me, man, so just, please, call me back... Listen, I'll narrate some books by message to break up

the boredom in there, if it means you forgive me for whatever it is I did. Will do. I don't even know anymore. Just call me. Please. It's Sally. Grissom.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

SG: Anthony.. I really, really hope you're okay. I know you couldn't possibly be okay, but that's all I want for you. If you're there, please just tell me you're not dead. I can't lose a friend like you. I can't sit here, not knowing what's going on with you. Please talk to me.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

SG: Partridge, I... I think this will be my last message. Without anything else to go on, I have to tell myself something is either broken, in which case, you'll fix it, or... Maybe you just can't hear me anymore. I will always remember what you've done for me. I'll be here, if you want to talk. Love you buddy.

PM: I think that's everything you wanted.

BC: Thank you, Petra. This is everything from 1950 through '53?

PM: Should be. I don't really know what you want with time-off requests, though.

BC: Just one more way to check Esther's movements against the court record. You have to enter a reason for taking time off, paid or unpaid. If she gave any specifics, we could determine who she might have met with during those lectures and whatnot.

[[SFX: Sally hangs up a phone and enters the room]]

SG: We won't be able to cross-reference with HUAC, though. Whickman doesn't have the juice to get us access right now.

Petra: Wow–

LG: Focus, people. Focus on what we have in front of us. House Unamerican is–

SG: A luxury we can't afford?

LG: Not the way I was going to phrase it, but, yes, more or less.

SG: Yeah, doesn't sound right, does it?

BC: Yeah, that's odd. // **PM:** No, not at all.

SG: What are you looking at, anyway?

[[SFX: Lou flips a page]]

LG: Blackroom call logs. I started wondering about the people in this organization with the clearance to contact the Blackroom. Specific call codes correspond to specific personnel, with each logging the time of their call, and the response by the Blackroom.

[[SFX: Petra takes the file]]

PM: Hmmm. Whickman and Roberts show up a lot. Also an “HC53?"

SG: That’ll be Hank Cornish.

PM: Lou, wait a second. Look here.

LG: Right, there are no responses logged from the Blackroom after March 1st.

PM: This is the date of my mission in Russia. This is the last call that went out before the Blackroom went silent. Is “LG51” supposed to be you?

LG: That... is my Blackroom code. What in the hell?

SG: Lemme see that.

[[SFX: Sally grabs the page]]

BC: Why do you have a Blackroom code? We’re both analysts, and I was never issued one.

LG: I asked Whickman to grant me probationary field agent status, at least until we can track David down. With my military background, he said yes as long as I went through the accelerated training program. That technically grants me a Blackroom code. I’ve never used it. I hardly know how to! I was only run through it twice in training.

PM: So there’s no way that call could have been you?

LG: None. As I recall, I was still in the process moving into my apartment in town. Took up most of the week, not just that day.

SG: I can vouch for that, I was there. Almost knocked my front teeth out moving the sofa inside.

PM:

BC: Clearly a smokescreen of some kind? Look, there's a couple of other Blackroom calls I haven't been able to account for either. Random access codes every time. But there’s no way to tell who it’s meant to cover. Are we thinking Soviets? Someone Vasilievich worked with, other than David?

LG: Hmm... Inconclusive.

SG: What a dick move! Why are spies such jerks? Uh, present company excluded, Petra.

PM: Hey, I've done my share of dirt. But one of two possibilities is the case here. Either they're alone, improvising and desperate... or they're being directed, and things are still going according to plan.

BC: ...Hard to say which is worse.

[[SFX: radio tuning; Lou's truck pulls up outside Petra's house]]

LG: So this is the place, huh?

PM: Yeah, that's her. Whatcha think?

LG: I'd say it's nicer than any house I lived in growing up. You buy it?

PM: I thought about it. The lady seemed kind of put out when I said I didn't know if I'd be in town long-term, but she left the option hanging if I ever decide to "settle down and find a nice young man." Not necessarily in that order.

LG: Seems pretty big for one person, even so.

PM: Are you trying to drop some kind of hint?

LG: I'm content with my bachelor pad, for the moment. But thank you for thinking of me.

Petra: And thanks for agreeing to help me move all this junk inside. I just think it'll be nice to have a lot of space to move around in for a change. Get away from people, noise, everything. No more living inside shoeboxes for ol' Petra.

LG: You deserve it. Want to get started?

PM: ...Yeah. Let's go.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

SG: Diary of Doctor Sally Grissom, April 19th, 1953. We just kind of hit a lull in the search, so I needed to get out of that stuffy-ass room for a second and have a minute to myself. It's days like this, when the four of us are neck-deep in paperwork, that I reminisce about laptops with easily sortable browser tabs. I'm not sure how Gaines and Chambers keep everything straight in their heads when it's just this... whhosh! This blizzard of tiny, nothing details. They are pretty amazing though. Petra doesn't give herself enough credit, either, she's been holding up better than I am.

If I can be honest, I barely know what the hell I'm even looking for anymore. Nothing we've found indicates she even had the free time for espionage. She barely got out of the lab often enough to bump into Marian more than once every couple months. But we have nothing that points to any other quote-"foul-play"-unquote, nothing we can pin on anyone else. Everyone's a little on edge right now. I wasn't sure how Petra would react when I told her I... struck out with Partridge. She didn't hit me! So there's that. But I didn't try it because she freaked me out that night. Okay, she freaked me out a little, but that's not why I did it. That girl has been through a lot. I can only guess at most of it. I tried to call Partridge again because she actually made me want to do the impossible, for her. She knows me as this mythical figure in ODAR, but that's not how I feel. I just kind of feel like a burden, I guess. Makes me think of something Roberts said to me, a long time ago: "We spit in the face of practicality every day." The Timepiece wasn't even working properly by that point, and we didn't know a fraction of what we know now. Everything was clear except the future. We knew where we stood. Now we second-guess every–

[[SFX: door knock]]

SG: Yeah?

[[SFX: Bridget opens the door]]

BC: We just got a call from Mr. Whickman's office. It sounded urgent.

SG: Crap. Okay, thanks Chambers, I'll be right there... *[to diary]* 'Til next time.

SG: Okay, so... I'm here. Why are you looking at me like that?

CW: Doctor– Sally, I know how hard you all have been working, so I thought I should tell you immediately... There's no easy way to put it.

SG: Okay, fine, spit it out.

CW: I just got a call from DC, Sally, and they tell me Esther Roberts' execution has been rescheduled. Last rites to be performed six months from now, not a few years, as standard practice would–

SG: Are they going to do what they did to the Rosenbergs? Whickman!

CW: Not as I understand it, no.

SG: Is it meant to send a message? The Soviets they think she works for?

CW: I think they just want the problem to go away, Sally! I don't know that they're being entirely rational about the situation. I have agents out there right now, looking for David Marian and Amelin Vasilievich, without Blackroom support on any level. I'm doing what I can, but this dragon has three heads. You and your team will have to take on at least one of them.

SG: Okay. Okay, right. Six months to smoke out the mole. I'll let them know. Jesus.

CW: We could certainly use him on our side right now.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

BC: He's serious?

SG: He called me up right after he heard. I know we wanted to crack this thing a lot sooner than six months, but this still changes things. Right?

LG: No telling exactly how long an internal appeal for Roberts would take. There's a lot we could find between now and then that would speed up the process.

BC: Also a lot that could go wrong. Whoever made that call to the Blackroom is still in play, and they could be setting us up for something nasty. If they can't get away with, well, killing us, they'll be trying to spike our wheel.

PM: I hate to sound cliché, but it could come from any direction.

BC: We are at a pretty severe disadvantage.

LG: You're right about that. But we stay prepared. Stick together as much as possible, and watch each other's back.

BC: You're speaking from experience.

LG: I am.

SG: You think we're targets?

LG: Hard to say. Their only action we can prove is the Blackroom call. That was a crippling blow to ODAR's infrastructure, but no direct action was taken.

PM: A man died because of it, though.

LG: Like it or not, this is war. Not one we started, but we all have to carry our dead.

PM: So where else do we look?

LG: Employment records, for a start.

BC: Maybe we get a look at some other field agent profiles, see if we can catch anything that hasn't been inked out.

LG: That's solid. David was only one of several new field agents recruited that year.

SG: Don't they do pretty thorough background checks before they give the OK?

PM: Sure they do. But we're living in the '50s. Analog fax machines are the best you're gonna get around here, and they're pretty rare. The system isn't perfect.

BC: Breaking news from the stone age: we get by just fine.

LG: Aside from that, David is the most ready example that the change might happen when they're already past our defenses.

BC: ...Did you ever see any sign he was a sympathizer?

LG: No. No, he was a pretty fervent anti-Stalinist, in my experience. Maybe we was trying to convince himself, or put up a front... Seems to have worked on me.

PM: Not just you, though. Remember how Whickman reacted when David and the Russian escaped? They had you pegged for the sympathizer, not their golden boy in the shadows.

BC: There is someone we haven't considered.

LG: Who's that?

BC: If we're considering field agents, then we also have to consider your sister, Petra.

PM: ...What did you say?

BC: I know, I know, I don't want to think about it either. But haven't we been burned like that before? This thing turns friends, family against each-

PM: You shut your mouth. You do not get to drag her into this.

SG: Petra, she's not--

PM: Don't start, Sally, you don't know any more about Carmen than she does. Carmen wouldn't do that.

BC: Please just hear me out, just for a second.

PM: Why should I? What can you possibly know about why she does what she does?

BC: Nothing! I know next to nothing, Petra, and that's what makes me worry. Doctor Elbourne's method gave you both an immunity to Butterfly Syndrome, and now you can both do all these amazing things. You can duplicate yourself! I think it's only fair to consider that she could be using that same

ability. Maybe there's a double of her somewhere with a different ideology. I don't know how this all works, but I–

PM: Just shut up! My sister would not do that to me!

BC: She might not have known it was you! But we won't know unless we–

PM: Rrrgh!

BC: Petra, please!

[[SFX: Petra storms out and slams the front door]]

BC: Oh lord...

LG: It's okay, she'll be okay.

SG: You're not wrong, Chambers, but I think she'll need some time to let that sink in.

BC: That all happened much too fast.

LG: You said what we all needed to hear. What David did shouldn't be repeated.

BC: Thank you. I'm sorry, Sally.

SG: No worries, but that slam might've woken my neighbor.

[[SFX: radio tuning; Petra storming away]]

PM: *[crying]* Goddammit! That stupid bitch!

[[SFX: Petra sits on the ground]]

PM: Oh god, Carmen. It isn't you, I know it isn't you... Carmen, where are you?
[[SFX: someone approaches]]

IDA: Oh goodness! Sweetheart, are you alright?

[[SFX: Petra stands, sniffs, dries her tears]]

PM: Yeah. I think I will be. Things just got a little intense in there.

IDA: I know how that can be. But family is everything, isn't it?

PM: ...What?

IDA: Weren't you just having an argument with your sister? I thought you might be Dr. Grissom's sister. Or niece, maybe.

PM: Oh, uh, no, we just kind of work together sometimes. We were fighting about work.

IDA: My word, must be serious if it's got you out here. Not that I mean to pry. I only thought you might need a cup of hot tea and a moment to find your footing again.

PM: Thanks, it's sweet of you to offer. You don't need to do that, I'll be okay.

IDA: Your choice, of course. But you needn't say anything if you don't want to, and I always find chamomile helps me put my thoughts in order.

PM: Thank you. I guess I'll have some. I'm Petra.

IDA: Petra. What a lovely name. You can call me Ida.

PM: You've got a beautiful home.

[[SFX: they walk back to Ida's house; the door shuts behind them; tape recorder stops]]

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ars PARADOXICA was created by Daniel Manning & Mischa Stanton. Season 3 was also written by Eli Barraza, Julian Mundy, Danielle Shemaiah & Tau Zaman.
Episode 25: Absence features -

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Maxximillian Dafoe (Ida)
with special thanks to Isabel Atkinson

Original music by Mischa Stanton and by Eno Freedman-Brodmann.
Additional music used courtesy of the Free Music Archive
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08 12 06 26 08 12 26 06 13 10 14 06 02 12 12 20 16 11 12 21
26 26 17 26 01
WEATHER: humid

26: Grip

WRITTEN BY ELI BARRAZA
DIRECTED & SOUND DESIGN BY MISCHA STANTON

[[SFX: tape recorder starts; Sally and Petra climb a radio tower]]

SALLY GRISSOM (SG): And we haven't fully explored the possibility that you might be the mole. You and your sister are wild cards, like the creepy twins in the Shining.

PETRA MARQUEZ (PM): UGH, shut up! Just... if I could tell my younger self that I'd side with June Barlowe and tell Sally Grissom repeatedly to shut the fu–

[[SFX: something on the tower breaks; Sally swings free]]

SG: Petra! Shit shit. Petra, I'm slipping!

[[SFX: Petra scrambles down to Sally]]

PM: Hold on.

SG: That's kind of what I'm trying to do and you are taking too long.

[[SFX: Petra stops]]

PM: ...I could just let you fall, you know.

SG: What? That's crazy!

PM: Is it?

SG: You know ODAR would send someone back to save my dumb brain or whatever!

PM: I think you place too much value on yourself, Grissom.

[[SFX: the tower groans; radio tuning; Petra absentmindedly stirs her tea]]

IDA: ...Petra? Petra, hello. Anybody there?

PM: Hm? Oh, sorry, Ida. Drifted off for a second there, huh.

IDA: You seemed like you were a million miles away. Is everything alright?

PM: It's fine. I mean, it's not fine. Clearly, if I'm here everything is not fine. I thought it was, but I guess it wasn't.

IDA: Is this about Dr. Grissom?

PM: Yes.

IDA: Oh... I was rather hoping you had made up.

PM: Me too. We did. At first.

[[SFX: radio tuning; Lou sets down a stack of files]]

SG: Ugh, I feel like these government invoices are giving me Butterfly Syndrome. How do you think they keep track of costs across timelines? Is there some über-accountant who could crunch the timelines to see which vendor would be the cheapest?

LOU GAINES (LG): I wouldn't put it past the government to take a chance to save a buck.

SG: Quantum physics, I get. God, this is worse than applying for grants.

BRIDGET CHAMBERS (BC): I wish I could ask Charlotte for help. Or Priscilla. No offense, but they were on the Manhattan Project and this sort of thing… they'd take to a bit better.

[[SFX: knock on the front door]]

BC: Just a minute.

[[SFX: Bridget exits]]

SG: I hope it's pizza.

LG: Pizza?

SG: You mere mortals have never known the joys of thirty minutes or less delivery pizza.

[[SFX: front door opens; Petra enters]]

PM: It was only good if the pizza guy didn't hold the box sideways. Stoners, am I right?

SG: That didn't actually–

BC: Sorry, she just sort of… came in.

PM: I'm back on board. I thought a lot about what you said and while I am still… unhappy, I recognize that Esther's impending… due date has affected some more than others and caused said individuals to make inane accusations despite their alleged intelligence and composure.

BC: I stand by what I said, Petra–

PM: Thus, I have decided to bestow my unending reservoir of forgiveness upon this individual for the greater good. But the thing is, we're a team and we've been working like one team member's strength is everyone's strength. We're not all top researchers, Bridget.

BC: You say that like it's an insult.

LG: I think what Petra is trying to say is that if we're going to find out who this mole is, we need to utilize everyone's skills.

SG: Please tell me this means I can stop looking at invoices.

LG: Bridget, what if we went to Charlotte?

PM: Who now?

BC: What? And ask her for advice to hunt down a mole… like she had to help monitor things in Los Alamos, yes! Yes, that could work quite well. Ask her questions, nothing specific of course, just old friends catching up. I do miss New York.

LG: I'll buy the tickets in the morning and cover my own ground. Divide and conquer!

SG: What did I just witness.

BC: A plan that sure as hell beats invoices.

PM: And while you two are off to the Big Apple?

SG: We... are going to tackle the science!

PM: Science, very specific.

SG: If the Blackroom was compromised, there has to be a logical explanation for it. We're going to reverse engineer how someone could neutralize the Blackroom.

[[SFX: radio tuning; Ida sips her tea]]

PM: How have you been Ida? Last I saw you, you were all ears but hardly said anything.

IDA: Oh, you know how it goes. Small town, quiet life. That Sally Grissom sure makes it a bit more interesting though. Always people in and out and those gadgets she makes! I'm so fond of them.

PM: I know how Sally is doing, Ida. How are you doing?

IDA: Well, let's see. I've been tending to my garden. Gossiping with the ladies at grocery store. We all like to sneak over to the diner and gab so long as milk's not on the grocery list. Lotta talk about how the town's changed. I've only seen some of it, you know.

PM: Oh are you not from here?

IDA: Ah, no, no I am not. One of the many transplants. I was looking around one day and thought "Ida, you need a change. You're gonna pick a point on a map and you're going to move there and that will be that." And then I did. Point-of-Exile, I admit I was being a bit melodramatic when I picked it.

PM: We've all been there. I used to fake Butter... scotch candies. That I had them when my sister wasn't paying attention to me. They were her favorite. Well, second favorite but it still worked anyway.

IDA: You and your sister grew up here?

PM: Um, yeah. I guess so. But this isn't really the same Point-of-Exile I grew up in. Times change, you know?

[[SFX: radio tuning; Chet's office]]

SG: Okay, from the top.

PM: Option one. The soviets broke into the Black Room. Option Two. Anthony is dead. Option Three. The soviets tampered with the Blackroom transmitter. Option Four. The soviets tampered with our receiver.

CHET WHICKMAN (CW): Option five. The soviets are smarter than Sally and figured out an undetectable way to interrupt the signal.

SG: Hey, no comments from the peanut gallery. You're only here to supervise the handling of top secret material or whatever.

PM: He might have a point.

SG: Don't take his side!

CW: If the soviets broke into the Blackroom, we would've found out far sooner.

PM: They would've been there since 1943... in this iteration at least.

SG: Right, so option one is out.

PM: Chet, did ODAR put in some sort of contingency plan for when Anthony died?

CW: As far as I'm aware, we made sure to put in a detector for die-eth-el whatever–

PM: Diethyl disulfide.

CW: Yup.

PM: ...What? They trained us in all sorts of shit.

[[SFX: Petra examines the blueprints]]

PM: This right here, I was wondering what this gizmo was for. Basically when it goes off–

SG: Tachyons get emitted which set off an alarm that's loud enough to hear basically anywhere, temporally-speaking.

CW: Esther and I have the alarms in our offices. We'd know immediately if he died.

PM: Which brings us to option three, did they tamper with the outgoing messages?

SG: Everything in here says otherwise. The Blackroom was built to be self sufficient, transmitting directly to ODAR without bouncing the signal. If they tampered with the transmitter, it'd be the same scenario as option one.

PM: Which leaves us with them sabotaging the receiver.

CW: I can't have you poking around the equipment. Schematics was bad enough but–

SG: We'll go to Philadelphia.

CW: Philadelphia?

SG: I added some of my own… flair to a radio tower there. It's how I've been talking to Partridge. If the mole found out about it and cut me off too, they'd have gone there. That's where I bounce my signal through.

PM: I smell a road trip!

SG: Yeah, last road trip I went on didn't exactly go well, Petra.

CW: I'll book you two tickets. Out of pocket. Just, try not to bring back any saboteurs this time?

PM: Not in the mood to use innocent people as target practice, Chet? You can keep your blood money, I have a friend who can fly us. Mum's the word with him. Off the books, low profile, yada yada.

SG: Do I even want to ask?

PM: Nope.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

IDA: Is Carmen the only one you get along with, Petra?

PM: I get along with people!

IDA: Petra...

PM: Okay fine, people are… hard sometimes. I get along with you alright so far.

IDA: So far? You're expecting this to go south?

PM: I don't have a great track record.

IDA: When your heart is all fire, people fear getting burned. They don't often realize that it can warm them as well.

PM: I used to have a friend I could talk to but I only saw him every few years and then…

IDA: And then what?

PM: He died. I keep thinking about how I could change that but…

IDA: It's not your fault, dear. Everyone has their time to go. There's nothing you could have done. I know, emotions tend to disagree with that logic but there's no use in mourning people forever. It's not our responsibility to get into the tiny little details, about what we could have done differently.

PM: Ha, sure. I guess you could say that.

IDA: Well what about your sister? Can you talk to her about this?

PM: She's… not here. She's seeing the world, that whole thing. We went through some rough times but patched things up before she left. I can't really blame her leaving. I spent plenty of time traveling myself.

IDA: Studying abroad?

PM: Something like that. But it was… I was hoping... This sounds so stupid, but I was hoping to find a face like mine.

IDA: I'm not sure I follow.

PM: I grew up here but I'm not from here. Like, I don't really know where I come from. I was hoping that I'd find… I know it's dumb, I had a really great dad. He was… he liked Arbor Day, and sneaking us music we weren't supposed to listen to. Sometimes he'd just let me sit in his office when I was having a bad day. I'd play with this puzzle until he finished and then he'd walk me back to my room and tuck me in even though I said I was too old for it.

[[SFX: Petra takes a final sip of tea.]]

PM: I miss him but he's gone now so I thought maybe I could find out where I came from. Before he was my dad, I mean. There wasn't any helpful paperwork so I kind of just hoped luck would be on my side. Like, do you know where you come from Ida? Your ancestors and all that, I mean.

IDA: I know my parents and grandparents. Beyond that, just the broad strokes I suppose.

PM: See, you can… move forward and you can do that with the love of your ancestors at your back. But me, I move forward with my ancestors by my side but their faces are strangers. Moving in parallel, not knowing the other exists and powerless to help anyway. That's the way it feels sometimes, I mean. This is stupid, I'm sorry. I shouldn't have said anything, I don't know what's getting into me.

IDA: It's alright dear, you take your time. I'll put on some more water for tea and you can have a minute. Nothing to feel embarrassed about.

[[SFX: Ida takes Petra's cup to the kitchen; radio tuning; Sally and Petra get into a plane; the door shuts]]

SG: And you trust this guy? With our lives. In the air.

PM: Yep.

SG: Looks like I picked the wrong week to quit drinking.

PM: "Surely you can't be serious."

SG: "I am serious and don't call me Shirley."

PM: "What is it Doctor Grissom? What's going on?"

SG: "I'm not sure. I haven't seen anything like this since the Anita Bryant concert."

PM: ...Yeah, the version I saw doesn't reference Anita Bryant.

SG: Good, she's the worst.

PM: You know, only Carmen could out-quote me when it came to Airplane?

SG: Really? She doesn't seem the type.

PM: Yeah, well, you know us subjects of morally reprehensible human experimentation, we're full of surprises.

[[SFX: the pilot exits the plane]]

SG: Where'd your guy go?

PM: Probably doing last minute checks and his good luck ritual. Superstitious type.

SG: You're really making me feel better about this tin can we're in, Petra.

PM: Relax, it'll be fine! Let's talk Philadelphia. We get there, we scale the tower, check for tampering and then make our merry way back?

SG: Yep.

PM: I hope there'll be trespassing.

SG: I think Chet smoothed things over with them. Just two repairmen checking on things.

PM: "Repairmen." Right. They're in for a bit of a surprise.

SG: We're both smooth talkers, we'll be fine.

PM: You're many things, Sally, but a smooth talker is not one of them.

SG: Hey, I am great at the smooth talking! I can smooth talk the smoothest talker with my smooth… talks...

PM: Yeah, so I've heard. Just like Quentin Barlowe's eulogy, right? You've got a track record for the smooth talks.

SG: That was one time! Anyway he didn't stay dead. And turned out to be way more interesting than I initially gave him credit for.

[[SFX: the pilot re-enters, flips switches to start the plane]]

SG: Guess we better ixnay on the alktay...

PM: Nah, it's fine. He's hard of hearing and as soon as his headset is on, he won't be able to hear a word we say unless we want him to. Why I like the guy. Discretion is his middle name.

SG: That why he called you Lydia Deetz? I love Winona Ryder.

PM: I haven't the faintest idea what you're referring to.

SG: Right.

PM: It was my friend Liam's favorite movie. He was older than me and made sure me 'n Carmen knew about all the 80s 90s stuff so we could keep up with the older kids.

SG: Oh.

PM: Yeah, we thought he was cool. Pretty sure Matthias and Fatima made fun of him for hanging out with us younger kids though.

[[SFX: The airplane moves down the runway, preparing for takeoff.]]

SG: I don't think I've ever heard you talk about them.

PM: Don't get used to it.

SG: Do you base all of your fake identities on things they liked?

PM: Now, why would I go and tell you a thing like that, Sally? Let's just say that after this, Lydia Deetz is a dead woman.

SG: Petra. Is there anyone you can be… real with? Like, be yourself? Maybe Carmen?

PM: [sigh] Even with her, I'm just a version of myself. All of these versions of me and all of them are true, even the ones I think are lies. I stopped believing in objective truth a long time ago. Now it's whatever the consensus is.

SG: Worldwide consensus is that time travel doesn't exist but you and I know otherwise.

PM: Fine. Then it's about whatever your frame of reference is! Whatever. Girl tries to say one cool thing….

[[SFX: takeoff; radio tuning; a kettle on the stove]]

IDA: We don't have to talk about the why anymore but if you'd like to talk about the where and the what, I would love to hear about your travels. I thought picking up and moving states was a big deal but you have me beat by quite a ways.

PM: Ida, don't sell yourself short. What you did is pretty damn commendable.

IDA: Please...

PM: Alright, alright. Well, let's see. Mexico was easiest to get to off the bat so I hung around there for a while. Tried to find some artists I'd heard about.

IDA: Artists? I mean no offense but you don't strike me as the type to take to art.

PM: You kidding me? Love it. Especially when it gives the man the bird.

IDA: Petra!

PM: Ah, sorry. I didn't mean it that, that way. I mean, um, you know when a lady painter does her thing, men be… darned.

IDA: Mmm, did you meet Ms. Kahlo down there?

PM: I was about to then I got embarrassed and kept my distance. I met some people who knew her though. Interesting crowd.

IDA: Would you want to travel again? Meet more… interesting people?

PM: I'm… not sure. Sometimes the idea of starting fresh somewhere sounds so appealing but I've started fresh so many times, it's kind of old hat now.

[[SFX: Petra and Sally ascend the radio station stairs]]

SG: Family business, huh?

PM: What? All of our brothers died so we had to take over and their usual contractor was already busy so they outsourced to us, local people, ties to the community blah blah blah.

SG: You whipped that accent out of nowhere!

PM: Yeah, it's called being a spy, Sally. Geez. The Philly accent isn't even that hard.

SG: Hah. Casual.

[[SFX: they reach the roof]]

PM: Hey, we got in, can take as long as we need to check out what might have gone wrong. I don't see why you're being so... Huh.

SG: What?

PM: It's just that it's… you know. Skyscraper tall.

SG: That's what I said! Bright side is that this time, we actually have safety equipment. I still can't believe I scaled this thing last time without any. Huh. I guess I am kind of a badass.

PM: Don't meet your heroes, they turn out to be self-congratulatory dweebs.

SG: Numbskull.

PM: Poindexter.

SG: Nerd.

PM: Egghead.

SG: Hey, um. Before we possibly climb to our deaths to find out if a foreign power has tampered with a transceiver I illegally installed?

PM: What?

SG: The trial.

PM: What about it.

SG: Did you--

PM: I told the truth, Sally. I answered Hank's inane questions, truthfully. I'm surprised it took you this long to ask, honestly.

SG: You hate her.

PM: That isn't… that wasn't relevant.

SG: You hating Esther wasn't relevant at the trial?

PM: What do you want me to say? What she did to me, what that iteration of her did to me was relevant. My feelings didn't matter when it came to the evidence. And right now, that's what matters. Evidence. There's evidence that Esther isn't guilty of what they accused her. We're looking for it. End of story. Later we can hold her accountable for…

SG: Crimes she hasn't committed yet? How Minority Report of you.

PM: What's Minority Report?

SG: Dammit, I keep forgetting you have an expiration date on references.

PM: ...Shut up and climb, Sally.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

IDA: Oh, I've never been the type of person to set down roots. I love the excitement of new places, and always new faces. Wandering the world is the ideal lifestyle for anyone... who isn't too afraid.

PETRA: I'm not afraid of anything! I'm angry, I'm just angry at what they did and I keep trying to convince myself that I'm not but it never works. Every new place, I can forget for just a little while but it never lasts.

IDA: What are you trying to forget? I'm so sorry Petra, I'm trying to follow.

PETRA: No, you're not trying to follow, Ida. You are following. This whole time, you've been trying to get me to talk about my family, about my life, about ODAR. You're trying to see if you can turn me against them, if I'll go and work for your people.

IDA: I'm sure I don't know what you're talking about–

PETRA: Don't play dumb with me, Ida.

IDA: I did want to get to know you, Petra. Like I did want to get to know Dr. Grissom.

PM: Better the devil you know than the devil you don't.

IDA: I see.

PM: Yep.

IDA: I take it you are going to try to bring me in.

PM: Do or do not. There is no try.

[[SFX: A tense silence; the kettle whistles.; Ida flings her tea cup at Petra; she dodges, and it breaks; Petra grabs a knife and thrusts at Ida; Ida pulls a gun from a drawer and cocks it, but Petra knocks it away; Petra tackles Ida into the table, breaking it; they struggle on the ground until Petra restrains Ida]]

PM: You and me, Ida. We're going to ODAR to have a little chat.

[[SFX: radio tuning; Sally and Petra climb the radio tower]]

SG: *[winded]* You know... It's wild that... For two people... Who time-traveled... Against their will... From almost the same era... We don't... Get along... Better.

PM: Did you want to rest for a second?

SG: I'm fine. I can keep up.

PM: I don't know why that is to be honest.

SG: Maybe. It's like. Magnets. Similar polarities.

PM: We're not the same poles, Sally. And it's not like I'm…. repulsed by you.

SG: Really? I could have sworn–

PM: I just… I have a hard time abiding by people who choose to look past their friends' actions like you seem to.

[[SFX: they stop climbing]]

SG: Whoa, hold on. I do not just look past what my friends do. If you think that I've just been all smiles and snacking when it comes to what Esther has actually done, you would be sorely mistaken.

PM: Whatever.

SG: And another thing. Hypocrisy. You just look past the possibility that Carmen could be involved. You guys hero-worshiped me, I wouldn't be surprised if you two found out about my transceiver and Carmen decided to play inter-

PM: Shut up!

[[SFX: they resume]]

SG: And we haven't fully explored the possibility that you might be the mole. You and your sister are wild cards, like the creepy twins in the Shining. Didn't you go to Mexico or something for a while? Hang out with Trotsky while you were there?

PM: Your grip on reality is slipping if you think I'd hang out with Trotsky after what he-UGH, shut up! Just... if I could tell my younger self that I'd side with June Barlowe and tell Sally Grissom repeatedly to shut the fu-

[[SFX: something on the tower breaks; Sally swings free]]

SG: Petra! Shit shit. Petra, I'm slipping!

[[SFX: Petra scrambles down to Sally]]

PM: Hold on.

SG: That's kind of what I'm trying to do and you are taking too long.

[[SFX: Petra stops]]

PM: ...I could just let you fall, you know.

SG: What? That's crazy!

PM: Is it?

SG: You know ODAR would send someone back to save my dumb brain or whatever!

PM: I think you place too much value on yourself, Grissom.

[[SFX: the tower groans]]

SG: You're really freaking me out right now!

PM: Promise you and the others will stop looking into Carmen.

SG: You know I can't-

PM: Then I can't.

SG: Fine!

[[SFX: Petra grabs Sally and hoists her up; they catch their breaths]]

SG: Were you really just gonna long live the king me there?

PM: I really don't know. Sorry.

[[SFX: radio tuning; ODAR archives]]

BC: Sally, that's insane. She's insane!

SG: No, she isn't, she's just hurt that we'd accuse her sister! I think. Look, we were climbing this radio tower, emotions were… *heightened*...

BC: You are not going to distract me with puns and finger guns at said puns, Sally–

SG: End of the day, we didn't find any evidence of tampering and I made up an excuse why I couldn't go with her and I booked a separate plane ride back because it was super awkward.

BC: Where is she now?

SG: Taking the day off I hope.

[[SFX: alarm; Petra enters]]

PM: Sally? Bridget? What're you guys doing in here?

BC: We've been here, what are you doing? What the hell's going on?

SG: It's the lockdown alarm. Petra, hurry and get in here. That door's gonna slam shut any—

PM: Wait wait wait Ida!

[[SFX: door slams shut; tape recorder stops]]

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ars PARADOXICA was created by Daniel Manning & Mischa Stanton. Season 3 was also written by Eli Barraza, Julian Mundy, Danielle Shemaiah & Tau Zaman.
Episode 26: Grip features –

Kristen DiMercurio (Sally Grissom)
Lia Peros (Petra)
L. Jeffrey Moore (Lou Gaines)
Preston Allen (Bridget Chambers)
Reyn Beeler (Chet Whickman)

Maxximillian Dafoe (Ida)
with special thanks to Isabel Atkinson

Production help from Alexander Danner. Original music by Mischa Stanton and by Eno Freedman-Brodmann.
ars PARADOXICA is brought to you by The Internet: No no Mom, don't click there.

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27: Breach

WRITTEN BY TAU ZAMAN
DIRECTED & SOUND DESIGN BY MISCHA STANTON

[[SFX: tape recorder starts]]

HANK CORNISH (HC): This is ridiculous; you run this place, you can put down any protocol number you want!

CHET WHICKMAN (CW): It doesn't work that way; I can't just make up a number.

HC: Why not?

CW: One, because your people investigate organizations that do that. Two, no one here would know what it means! With all due respect, this is already a big ask. My people have been burning the candle at both ends to gather these files for you and send them to your people. There are protocols for these kinds of document transfers, Hank! It takes time. And to be perfectly frank, I don't see any relevance now that the trial's over.

HC: It's not your job to see the relevance. It's your job to hand over the files we asked for.

CW: But of all things, the Plasticity reports? We don't conduct those trials anymore!

HC: We're going to need to review all of Ms. Roberts' experiments for the period of time called into question at her trial.

CW: I don't remember the court ordering any such thing.

HC: ...Director Whickman, with all due respect, you may not have been on trial, but you did not emerge from it unscathed. I wouldn't be surprised if they put you in the ring for the next round.

CW: I already testified in exchange for my immunity.

HC: You're running on borrowed time, Director. This whole debacle does not paint a pretty picture of your leadership skills. I imagine it's only a matter of time before you're replaced.

CW: They wouldn't replace me unless... unless they had a recommendation from their only liaison on the ground.

HC: That's right. I'm glad you're learning quickly. Now: The protocol numbers.

CW: ...Give me a day. I'll track down the number, I'll even ask everyone to hurry.

[[SFX: Hank goes to leave; opens the door; stops]]

HC: ...You don't know, do you? You don't even know any of the protocol numbers.

CW: Well I never had to! Esther used to sign off on all of that.

HC: *[under his breath]* Guess she really did run things around here. *[to Chet]* Have a good day, Director.

[[SFX: radio tuning; Petra leads Ida down a hallway in ODAR]]

IDA: You are all so paranoid about Soviet spies infiltrating your operations, and yet here you are, walking me into your base as if I were a guest.

PETRA MARQUEZ (PM): Please stop talking.

[[SFX: boots of an ODAR guard pass by]]

PM: Hi, hello.

[[SFX: Petra waits for the guard to pass.]]

PM: And you are a guest.

IDA: You know, I really could've killed you back there. I was going easy.

PM: No you weren't. You'd never let yourself get dragged into ODAR otherwise. At least here nothing can go —

[[SFX: an alarm blares]]

PM: ...Fffffuck.

IDA: What were you saying about — ?

PM: Shut up. We need to move.

IDA: By all means, I'm your hapless prisoner. Lead the way.

PM: We can't just stand in this hallway. Here! We'll go in here.

[[SFX. Petra opens a door and ducks into an adjacent room–the archives where Sally and Bridget have been talking.]]

PM: What're you two doing in here?

BRIDGET CHAMBERS (BC): We've been here, what are you doing? What the hell's going on?

SALLY GRISSOM (SG): It's the lockdown alarm. Petra, hurry and get in here. That door's gonna slam shut any—

PM: Wait wait wait Ida!

[[SFX: Ida runs off; the door slams shut; the alarm stops]]

SG: –second... Wait, who were you reaching for? Did you say Ida?

PM: Ida... I'd've... grabbed something from my quarters if I knew were gonna get stuck in here... *[under her breath]* Shit shit shit shit shit...

SG: Woah, relax, it's gonna be fine. You can probably grab it in five minutes. We used to have these lockdown drills all the time after Sharma.

BC: And these lockdown drills are for...

SG: Whickman's paranoia. But it's always been drills, no one's ever actually gotten in here.

PM: *[high-strung]* Nikhil Sharma got in here.

SG: [sigh] Okay. Fair. But I brought him in here, and we started having these lockdown drills because of that incident. I don't think anyone's gonna be bringing Soviet spies into ODAR anytime soon though.

PM: Of course... [muttering]

BC: Alright, so we just sit here, and wait it out?

SG: Pretty much. In fact, doors should be opening right about...

[[SFX: pause]]

SG: Okay maybe not right now but, pretty soon.

[[SFX: tape fast-forward]]

PM: It's been *hours*.

SG: It's never gone on this long. Comms are down, no announcements, no nothing.

BC: Something has to be really wrong.

PM: How... how fast does this lockdown protocol go off?

SG: What do you mean?

PM: Well let's say a..."foreign" agent does walk into here. Does someone have to notice? Run over to a switch, and push a button?

SG: Maybe? I... I don't know. Lockdown drills were always pretty quick and painless. No one ever trained us on how to activate a lockdown.

BC: It has to be Director Whickman. Why hasn't he said anything over the intercom yet? You'd think for something this major they'd wanna make announcements.

SG: "This is not a drill!"

BC: Exactly.

PM: And it's too quiet.

SG: Yeah. If this were an actual lockdown drill, we'd have guards running around the campus. It'd be livelier than... this. It's too quiet.

BC: Well, it happened pretty suddenly right? If they weren't at their posts, they'd be—

PM: –Locked in wherever they are.

SG: So much for protocol. Hm... maybe it means he didn't set it off. Maybe he's locked somewhere too.

BC: But then who could set it off?

SG: Maybe it's activated automatically.

PM: That, or someone activates it externally.

SG: You mean like... a hacker?

BC: What do you mean by hacker?

SG: It's like... a bank robber, I guess? But with computers? Someone help me out here.

PM: Question is, why would someone do that?

SG: Locking everyone in their rooms seems like a smart move if you wanna get the jump on them.

BC: It means they could move about with impunity.

SG: But...really? You think ODAR's actually under attack?

BC: It's a war, cold or not. I don't see why we'd rule out the possibility. We have guards for a reason.

SG: And here I thought we had enough.

BC: Right. Given that we're arguably the most powerful organization in the country, possibly even the world.

PM: Can we... can we please not?

BC: What? We are. That's an objective fact. Doesn't mean I like it.

PM: I know. I'm just not... thrilled at rehashing the obvious, especially when it's about how all-powerful uncle Chet is.

SG: Damn. That's... valid. What made you wanna come back to ODAR anyway? I thought for sure you'd finally be... gone.

PM: Carmen and I... we communicate a lot using the Blackroom computer system. There's a backdoor in the software that we can pass little notes through, as long as we're in an iteration of time where they haven't patched it yet. When it went down I went to investigate, and that's how I ended up in Moscow. When this whole thing kept getting weirder, I decided to stick around a little while. Better question is why wouldn't you ever really leave-

BC: -Okay everyone, now that we're all feeling the pressure cooker heat up a little bit there's no need for us to get snippy.

SG: It's fine. You know why I couldn't Petra. Probably for the same reason you're here. I'm responsible for this—

PM: -That's not why I'm here. I'm not responsible for any of this at all. Nothing about ODAR—

SG: —If you'll let me finish: I'm not blaming you. I'm just saying... when you see what people are capable of, sometimes it becomes your responsibility to keep them in check. Even if you didn't do anything to make them one way, you can still be responsible for how they turn out.

BC: Inaction, after all, is in itself a choice.

PM: [scoff] After the trial I bet you'd know a thing or two about that.

BC: What is that supposed to mean?

SG: Petra, what's gotten into you?

PM: I've gotta get outta here.

SG: Yeah, me too. I have to use the bathroom very badly. But Petra, you're... different. You've gotten dark.

PM: And what about you Sally?

SG: What about me?

PM: Can you name a single good or useful thing you've done in ODAR in the last several years?

BC: Okay why don't we all just calm down, and—

SG: I don't know what you've been up to Petra, but science takes *years*. Decades. And I already invented time travel, albeit accidentally, but you know what? Most of the scientific community would chalk that up as a lifetime achievement. So I've been working on... slower science since then. And trying to take care of myself. And I'm not ashamed of that. So could you cut me some fucking slack?

PM: Yeah so you accidentally invented the technology that destroyed my life!

SG: I'm gonna let that one go because I've spent the last several years thinking very long and hard about the consequences of that, but saying I ruined your life is not fair and you know that!

PM: Oh I think it's quite fair. Didn't you just say, even if you didn't do anything to make me one way, you're responsible for how I turned out?

SG: ...Yeah.

PM: You said you've kept ODAR in check. But you obviously didn't go through with it. Because I'm still from that future. I'm still me! You didn't do it. You didn't keep ODAR in check. You failed. At least so far. So don't fucking tell me you didn't ruin my life. You invented time travel. But you also made sure these people could use it on little kids! And that's why I have to be here today.

BC: You're a real hero, Petra. Dare I ask what you've been doing to save ODAR from itself?

PM: You have no idea.

SG: Well, we're asking.

PM: ...

BC: *[exasperated sigh, then relents]* Drop it, she won't answer. I really think we're all saying things we don't mean just because we can't walk out of that door.

SG: You're right. But I'm getting out of here somehow.

[[SFX: Sally drags a chair to underneath a vent, climbs the chair, unscrews the ventilation grate, and hoists herself inside]]

BC: Sally, what're you doing?

SG: *[inside the ventilation shaft]* The thing from Die Hard, I'm pretty sure!

BC: It could be dangerous! We've been locked down for hours, something serious has to be going on!

SG: Sorry, can't hear you, really gotta pee, bye!

[[SFX: Sally crawls into the vent; radio tuning; Sally inside the vent]]

SG: Wow, it is toasty in here. Please don't let me die in here.

[[SFX: Sally crawls, and brushes past a recording device; she pulls it away from the wall of the vent]]

SG: ...Holy fucking shit. Whickman, you are really something else. Just... look at this! Look at all of this! Microphones in the vents? In the walls? This is just like Polvo. This is what Donovan did. He's been recording...everything. Probably for years. Well. Since you can hear this. Fuck you, Chester Whickman!

CW: *[outside the vent]* Hello? Did someone say my name?

SG: Whickman, you fucker, I'm coming for you!

[SFX: Sally struggles to push herself through the vents until she can get to Whickman's room]]

CW: Sally? Is that you?

SG: Just... gimme a... minute... aaaaaah!

[[SFX: Sally falls through the vent and hits the floor with a bone-popping thud]]

CW: Sally, are you alright?!

SG: I'll...be fine.

[[SFX: Sally goes to stand, and her bones grind against each other unhealthily]]

SG: Nope! Not fine. Ow, that really hurts!

CW: Let me take a look at it.

SG: Wow. That was a steep drop. This vent was way higher up than the one I got into. Hey this is the dining hall! Score.

CW: This is not a..."score," Sally. There's no intercom here. I can't reach anyone. What happened?

SG: I don’t know, it’s a lockdown, I thought you might’ve called it—

CW: Also, what did you call me in there?!

SG: Oh yeah wait, Whickman, what the fuck! You’ve been bugging all of ODAR? Putting mics in the vents?

CW: You know, I didn’t feel such a measure was necessary until all of my top agents decided to entertain an open revolt!

SG: This is beyond twisted.

CW: I think your whole arm is twisted.

SG: Yup, that would explain the perpetual, agonizing pain.

CW: I can fix it.

SG: Are you sure you know what you’re doing, Whickman?

CW: I have some field training, Sally. More than you do.

SG: Oh god, this is gonna hurt, isn’t it.

CW: Quite a bit. One... Two...

[[SFX: Chet forces Sally's arm into another configuration]]

SG: AAAAAAAAUUUGH BUTTSTICKS.

CW: Did it... Did it work?

SG: NOT AT FUCKING ALL, WHICKMAN. It hurts even worse now!

CW: Really? That’s exactly how they did it in the...

SG: In the what?

CW: Never mind.

SG: Were you gonna say... the movies, Whickman?

CW: So you broke out by moving through the vents. Smart.

SG: Not so smart: crashing and immobilizing myself. Ow!

[[SFX: they stand]]

CW: If I can get outta here through those vents... How can I get up there?

SG: Why not just hop on my totally uninjured shoulders?

CW: Really?

SG: NO!

CW: Alright, alright!

SG: Grab a chair or something.

CW: All these benches are bolted down.

SG: Oh god. I'm stuck with my boss and a broken arm.

CW: *[sarcastic]* I'm thrilled.

SG: At least there's gotta be food around here.

CW: Probably. I didn't even think to look for food.

SG: ...You've been sitting in a dining hall for hours and that didn't cross your mind?

CW: Do you think I spent my time in a lockdown fishing for a turkey sandwich, Sally?

SG: Fair point. So have you figured out what's going on?

CW: Not a clue. But ya know what? I'm not gonna have this job much longer anyway! Someone else can agonize over getting this machine running. So yeah. Let's eat.

[[SFX: Chet storms into the kitchen and rifles around the cabinets; Sally follows]]

CW: Let's see, what do we have here...

SG: What do you mean you won't have the job?

CW: I'm on the outs, kid. Cornish is already gunning to replace me. Could be worse... Esther had it worse. Then again she's why I'm losing this job.

SG: You know you don't mean that.

[[SFX: Chet opens the refrigerator]]

CW: How do ya like your eggs?

SG: Scrambled. Wait, are you seriously making eggs right now?

CW: Why not? I'm stuck with you, neither of us can reach the vent to get outta here, and ODAR is either being invaded, occupied, or otherwise infiltrated as we speak, under my watch. So why, Sally, the hell not.

[[SFX: Chet prepares scrambled eggs throughout]]

SG: Uh, ‘cause my arm is twisted and I’d like to find a doctor? This is so unlike you. I’ve just never known you to... quit.

CW: Sally. I’ve given everything for this job. For this country. Whichever sorry sucker tries to fill my shoes... let ‘em try.

SG: I think you just need, like, a vacation, Whickman.

CW: I’d be lying if I said I never thought about just being a civilian.

SG: You know you can’t be one. For the same reason the rest of us can’t. Now that you know this exists, there is no normal life to go back to.

CW: You sure? You don’t think Jack Wyatt’s out on some beach sipping a rum and coke?

SG: He could be. Dude knew how to cover his tracks I guess.

CW: He was always...

SG: Neurotic. Yeah.

CW: He was hardly the most anxious person in here.

SG: I’m pretty sure paranoia’s a requirement for recruitment.

CW: Uh, no, that’s not in our desired personality profile per se—

SG: Whickman, that’s called passive aggression.

CW: I don't-

SG: The fucking wires in the walls, Whickman?!

CW: Oh, that, I mean, we never really planned for anyone in here to really need to crawl through the vents.

SG: That explains how you thought you could get away with it. Not the why would you pull that big brother shit.

[[SFX: Chet turns off the stove]]

CW: Dinner’s served.

SG: I’m not letting this go Whickman. I may not have eaten for... several hours, but you’re not gonna distract me with dinner!

CW: Salt and pepper?

SG: Please, thank you.

[[SFX: tape fast-forwards]]

CW: And the verdict?

SG: Compliments to the chef.

CW: What do you say we make it a dinner and a movie?

[[SFX: Chet rolls out a projector on a cart]]

SG: No way.

CW: Take a look at this!

SG: Oh man, I can't believe we're this lucky!

CW: Not having room for an auditorium paid off, apparently. I present to you: a movable feast!... for, um, the eyes.

SG: What movies do we have in there? The Day the Earth Stood Still? North by Northwest?

CW: Hm, no labels on these things. Let's just fire one up. Wanna use that wall over there?

SG: Let's do it!

[[SFX: Chet fires up the projector; the "ODAR & You!" recruit training tape begins to play]]

CW: Oh Jesus...

SG: Oh god no I immediately regret this decision.

CW: I can't watch this even one more time. Even just passing through when the new recruits are watching it is so depressing.

SG: I'm kinda surprised you don't just eat up all things ODAR, corny training videos and all.

CW: They have their purpose, I'll give them that.

SG: Please just shut it off already!

CW: Alright, alright!

[[SFX: Chet turns off the movie, then rifles for another]]

SG: Try the next one. I wonder what it is. I'm guessing you guys don't have sexual harassment lectures yet.

CW: Harassment lectures??

SG: They're these videos people watch from my time about how to not be a jerk, and all that. They're required, most places.

CW: Well we don't have any sort of harassment here.

SG: [snorts]

CW: What, you really think there is?

SG: If it exists in 20[redacted], you can bet it exists now. Pop the next one in.

CW: Alright then.

[[SFX: Chet puts in another movie; bright cheery muzak plays, the start of the film "Reefer Madness"]]

SG: Holy shit, Reefer Madness!

CW: We won't be needing that.

SG: Nah, leave it on! I could use a laugh.

CW: I think this is meant to be more instructional, Sally.

SG: Trust me, with me it'll be a hoot.

[[SFX: they watch in silence for a moment]]

CW: How's the arm?

SG: A lot better, actually. I don't think it's ready to hoist you up onto my shoulders for ventilation-shaft spelunking yet.

CW: That's fine. It's... the middle of the night. I doubt I could get ODAR up and running even if I could get out of here.

SG: I'm surprised you're not in a bigger hurry to get out of here.]

CW: Me, too.

SG: What changed?

CW: I don't know if I changed. I just think... maybe not being in control feels kind of nice.

SG: A lockdown is definitely not supposed to go this long. Something's very wrong, Whickman.

CW: I know. But I also know when I try too hard to control things, I just...

SG: Kill people?

CW: Sally.

SG: Okay that was low. But we never really finished our talk from that night—

CW: But that doesn't mean I haven't thought about it Sally.

SG: Well nothing about how ODAR runs has changed, Whickman!

CW: You're right. But, everything's about to. A lot.

SG: You seem really convinced you're getting canned, huh.

CW: You didn't see the look on his face...

SG: Whose?

CW: Never mind.

SG: Here I thought we were getting somewhere. [winces] Ah...

CW: You alright?

SG: Just... it's better, but it hurts... I'd kill for a joint right now.

CW: ...

SG: What? Listen, I haven't had one in years. Plus it's not like I could find one in the middle of nowhere.

CW: [chuckles]

SG: What? What're you giving me that look for?

CW: That's where you're wrong.

[[SFX: Chet pull a joint out of his pocket]]

SG: Ho... Ly... Fucking... Shit. The Golden Boy smokes the devil's lettuce?!

CW: Keep your voice down!

SG: So this is what you do when we all go to bed, you reach into your secret stash of earthly delights and pull out a heckin' blunt?!

CW: N-no! It’s nothing like that.

SG: Just an old habit from your petty officer days?

CW: This is a high stress job, and also, you know what, I pulled it out ‘cause I thought—

SG: Thought what?

CW: I don’t know, it was stupid. I have zero need to impress you.

SG: ...Aw, ‘cause we were having a moment!

CW: *[annoyed, embarrassed]* It was an exercise in trust.

SG: Your secret’s safe with me. IF you pass it to me.

CW: Oh, you’re greedy.

SG: Hey. I’m the one with the broken arm.

CW: Fair enough.

[[SFX: tape fast-forwards; later in the movie, Sally is laughing as though intoxicated, which she is]]

SG: So what do they say about you?

CW: I don’t know what you mean.

SG: Oh come on, you’ve been recording us all these years. What’s it like hearing everyone talk shit about you?

CW: They say more about you, actually.

SG: ...Yeah, I believe it.

CW: But. I don’t know, I hear what they say, and... [[puffs the joint, holding in smoke]] ...it really doesn’t matter. [exhales] At the end of the day, that’s the very small price of entry for getting to call the shots.

SG: So you just let it roll of your back?

CW: The old "Devil’s lettuce" helps.

SG: Doing what you have to do. I respect that. Doesn’t mean I’ll ever really forgive you for what you did...

CW: Huh?

SG: ...Killing Nikhil.

CW: Oh. Right.

SG: But. I get having to make hard choices.

CW: When you get to where I am, they don't even feel like choices. We've already corrected a thousand times for every choice. The Blackroom tells us the right choice. Or. It used to. I mean sure, carrying out those choices is hard, but they're really not hard to make.

SG: I get that. I could've taken a vacation too. A longer one, anyway. But. I just know this is where I have to be. And, it kinda sucks. But when you're born with a chance to change the world on this scale... it's not even a choice anymore. I feel like I got on this train and it's just got this one track to wherever it's going.

CW: *[sleepily]* Ironic.

SG: Given the branching possibilities of time travel, yeah. But it really doesn't matter. In any timeline I feel like this is the only place I ever could and would be. There was no choice. Not really.

CW: *[dozing off]* Counterpoint. Jack Wyatt.

SG: Counterpoint, I find it extremely hard to believe ODAR can't figure out where he is. You've gotta know where he is. Right? And I know you're just not telling me.

CW: ...

SG: ...Or telling anyone. [a moment of realization] An act of mercy on your part, I guess.

CW: ...

SG: Whickman? Whickman.

CW: [snores]

SG: [sigh] I'll see ya in the morning.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

PM: I mean. Listen. I'm not her biggest fan but she obviously doesn't work for communists. She literally invented the technology they stole.

BC: Or she gave it to them.

PM: You know she didn't.

BC: Ettie got put away for far less.

PM: True. She could've... given it to them by accident?

BC: That is how she tends to do things. [groans, exhausted] I've had it with this place!

PM: You're telling me.

BC: It's like... you can't trust anyone. Not even people you thought you knew.

PM: Nope. On that note: don't pay any mind to me.

[[SFX: Petra climbs up into the vent]]

BC: What! You can't just leave me here!

PM: *[inside the vent]* You could always climb!

BC: It's a lockdown! We're not supposed to be going anywhere! Petra? Petra? Goddamnit.

[[SFX: Petra shimmies away; outside the door, footsteps pass by]]

BC: Hello? Is anybody there?

[[SFX: the footsteps stop and circle back; radio interference, then the door unlocks itself and opens]]

BC: What're you doing here?

HC: Ms. Chambers! Exactly whom I was looking for.

BC: And how did you get the door open? There's a lockdown going on, you know.

HC: I'm going to need you to come with me.

BC: Why? There's literally nothing I know that you could possibly want to ask me about.

HC: Actually we've been waiting on a document transfer for sometime. The Plasticity reports?

BC: What about them?

HC: You pulled them before the trial. They're still marked as checked out.

BC: I... don't understand why you could possibly need them. Also, how are you out here whenever everyone else is locked down?

HC: Right place at the right time. Now, Ms. Chambers: the reports.

BC: Well, the whole place is locked down, I can't retrieve them!

HC: I got this door open. I can get others open.

BC: This isn't exactly protocol, I think Director Whickman would prefer—

HC: I'm asking nicely exactly once.

BC: Nicely? When?

HC: Alright, that's it.

BC: Let me go!

[[SFX: Bridget struggles as Hank drags her into the hallway; Lou Gaines approaches]]

LOU GAINES (LG): Hey!

BC: Lou!

LG: Mr. Cornish, you're going to let go of her this instant!

HC: [laughs] I can't believe they didn't disarm you after your last insurrection, Agent Gaines.

LG: Oh, they took that gun away. This one's extra for a rainy day.

HC: You've just pulled a gun on a supervisor and this is not going to pan out well for you. We wouldn't want our friend Ms. Chambers here getting caught in the crossfire, would we?

LG: What do you want with her?

HC: I have reason to believe has been requisitioning restricted files from the US government to copy into the ODAR archives.

BC: That's ridiculous. He told me he wants reports. He's lying!

HC: Oh it's quite true. I've been tracking your activity for weeks. You've requisitioned one too many flagged files, Ms. Chambers. This whole facility was set to lock down on my order.

LG: Or did you lock the place down so you could go searching yourself?

BC: Couldn't find them on your own?

HC: ...Well they weren't in the archives. Because you pulled them. At the very least locking down the place made sure I could get ahold of you. You know, it made perfect sense that the best person to hand over classified files to the Soviets would be someone as unassuming as ODAR's librarian.

BC: I'm not a librarian! Lou! You don't believe him, right? I have no idea what he's talking about.

HC: And now we need to be going. Once again Mr. Gaines, you're making a foolish mistake. I'll consider recommending a lighter sentence for you if you back down this moment.

[[SFX: Ida rounds the corner]]

IDA: Cornish!

HC: Ida! Right on time.

IDA: I've got the reports. And much more.

LG: Let her go or I will shoot! And I've got very precise aim.

HC: That precise, at this distance? I'd be surprised.

[[SFX: Hank takes a few steps, dragging Bridget with him]]

LG: Don't you back away from me!

HC: Oh I think I will. Because you know what your mistake is, Agent Gaines? You're actually a good person. You wouldn't take the shot. Huagh!

[[SFX: Bridget elbows Hank in the chest; she is free]]

BC: The next time you put your slimy hands on me, I'll hit ya where it really hurts.

[[SFX: she hits him again for good measure; he falls]]

HC: Ida! Little help!

BC: Lou! A hand?

[[SFX: Ida drags Cornish away; Lou rushes to Bridget]]

IDA: Cornish look out!

[SFX: Lou fires at Hank; he hits]]

HC: Augh!

IDA: I've got you. Let's go.

LG: Bridget, you alright?

BC: I'm fine.

HC: I'll see you all rot with Ms. Roberts.

BC: Quick, don't let them get away!

[[SFX: Ida and Hank run down the hall; Lou chases; tape recorder stops]]

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ars PARADOXICA was created by Daniel Manning & Mischa Stanton. Season 3 was also written by Eli Barraza, Julian Mundy, Danielle Shemaiah & Tau Zaman.
Episode 27: Breach features -

Kristen DiMercurio (Sally Grissom)
Lia Peros (Petra)
L. Jeffrey Moore (Lou Gaines)
Preston Allen (Bridget Chambers)
Reyn Beeler (Chet Whickman)
Dan Anderson (Hank Cornish)
Maxximillian Dafoe (Ida)
with special thanks to Isabel Atkinson

Production help from Dennis Connors. Original music by Mischa Stanton and by Eno Freedman-Brodmann.
ars PARADOXICA is brought to you by The Internet: Based on the television program Black Mirror.

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SIGNAL CORRUPTED

28: Adversary

WRITTEN BY DANIEL MANNING
DIRECTED & SOUND DESIGN BY MISCHA STANTON

[[SFX: tape recorder starts; hum of the Blackroom]]

ANTHONY PARTRIDGE (AP): I suppose you've got some questions. To answer most of them, in short: I quit the Blackroom and saved you all. I'm sure you feel hurt, or betrayed... or maybe you have no idea who I am and you found this tape on the street. If you did, I guess you'd be very confused.

But just so we're clear, I don't owe this to you, I don't owe anyone on the outside anything anymore. My debts are all paid up, and then some. You sent a man into the black to disappear and he disappeared. That's what I owe you. But, as I am a generous fellow with a rather inordinately large amount of time on his hands, I've chosen to dedicate hundreds of hours in order to deliver this to you. You can thank me in Hell.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

HANK CORNISH (HC): I'll see you all rot with Ms. Roberts!

IDA: Come on, let's go!

BRIDGET CHAMBERS (BC): Quick, don't let them get away!

[[SFX: Hank and Ida run down the hall; Lou pursues them at a sprint, breathing heavily]]

LOU GAINES (LG): Stop!

[[SFX: A vent bursts open overhead]]

PETRA MARQUEZ (PM): Surprise!

[[SFX: Petra jumps down out of the open vent and tackles Ida; the two struggle on the ground]]

LG: What the-!

HC: Ida!

[[SFX: Ida slides a large folder across the ground toward Hank]]

IDA: Take them! Go!

PM: Lou, I got her, you get Hank!

LG: Mhm.

HC: Don't let them take you alive, Ida!

[[SFX: Hank runs off; Lou pursues, leaving Petra and Ida on the floor of the hallway]]

IDA: [sigh]... Goodbye, Petra.

[[SFX: Ida cracks a poison capsule in her mouth and begins to seize]]

PM: Fff- no! Don't you– c'mon, no! Stop, no–

[[SFX: Despite Petra's efforts, Ida chokes and dies, Petra gives a frustrated, disappointed sigh. Action moves to Lou in pursuit of Hank; Lou runs past a sizzling, crackling door, giving off sparks; distracted, he falls down the steps]]

LG: Woah–oooof!

[[SFX: Sally bursts through the crackling door, now free; she runs down the steps to help Lou]]

SALLY GRISSOM (SG): Gaines, are you alright?

LG: I'm fine, Cornish is the mole, go!

SG: –Dammit, of course he is! Alright, I don't know how much help I'll be with my arm, but I'll do what I can!

[[SFX: Sally sprints down the stairs and rounds the corner into the basement hallway; Hank is trying unsuccessfully to open a security door with a keypad]]

HC: Sally don't trust them! Lou's been compromised by David Marian! It's a trap!

SG: No it's not!

HC: Alright, worth a try.

[[SFX: Hank types in the correct keycode and pulls the heavy door open]]

SG: Shit, the workshop!

[[SFX: Sally runs in after Hank, then pauses to listen for him]]

HC: *[distant]* Where is it, where is it, there's gotta be one here...

SG: Give it up, Cornish!

HC: Got it!

[[SFX: Hank flips a switch; a Timepiece spools up]]

HC: I've always hated you, you know that?

SG: What else is new?

HC: You were always a thorn in my ass, but not this time! This time you can't stop me!

[[SFX: Sally runs toward Hank, but too late: the Timepiece spools up to full power and Hank is gone.]]

SG: Shit! Shit shit shit fu–

LG: *[laughing]* I wouldn't worry.

SG: Lou?

LG: I pulled out the navigation circuit.

[[SFX: Lou tosses the Timepiece part onto a worktable]]

LG: I don't know where he went, but it's not where he thinks.

SG: How... How did you get here so fast?

LG: Hold on, stand back here with me. Hurry up!

[[SFX: Sally and Lou hide; a second Lou enters the workshop]]

LG-2: Cornish! Cornish? Sally?... All right, okay I can do this, okay, okay, he took this one, the second from the left, great. Ok, now, uh, okay, lemme use this one over here, so...

[[SFX: Lou activates another Timepiece and fiddles with the controls as it spools up]]

LG-2: Turn this dial, push this button, and...

[[SFX: The Timepiece activates, taking that Lou to the past]]

SG: ...Huh. Quick thinking.

LG: I've picked up a few tricks since I've been at ODAR.

SG: So it was Hank this whole time.

LG: I think. There was someone else too, a woman. I think her name was Ida.

SG: Ida, like my neighbor Ida? Like, makes me breakfast and asks about my–[day] Oh god, Ida. I need to sit down.

[[SFX: Sally stumbles]]

LG: I'm sorry, Sally.

SG: ...Could I have, like, one friend?! Like one, regular friend that doesn't try to kill me to take secrets or is secretly from the future or just SOMEBODY that isn't fucking involved with all of this?!

LG: ...If it's any consolation, my best friend is working for the Soviets too.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

AP: There's nothing you don't already know about for 72 hours in either direction, over.

[[SFX: Anthony sends off the message; a beep as he receives the reply; he presses "play"]]

KENZO SUGIMURA (KS): *[on radio]* Doable. By the way, remind him that they still have my Fleetwood Mac LPs, over.

[[SFX: Anthony types in the key command to respond]]

AP: Wait, that doesn't make any sense–they're from the '70s, you're in '52, over?

[[SFX: the reply]]

KS: *[on radio]* Are you gonna tell on me, over?

[[SFX: key command to respond]]

AP: I guess not, Ken. Good luck, over and out.

[[SFX: Anthony sends the reply]]

AP: Jesus. He's killing Stalin in three hours and he wants to know about his records? These people...

[[SFX: the alert beep of a new message; Anthony opens the file]]

AP: Huh.

[[SFX: Anthony picks up a cup to drink; a second message comes in; Anthony spits out the drink; radio tuning]]

AP: Seems like ODAR can't keep a secret to save our life. Someone's trying to leak basically everything they know to–well, right now I'm not sure but I have

my guesses... namely, our friends in the East. You should see what's being requested in this document transfer. It's everything! Well, practically everything. And so now, ol' Anthony is going to have to step in and save the day. So, thanks so much Chet once again, you're running a real tight ship here. You're welcome.

Now, this is a ultra high priority request. The whole system grinds to a halt. It's immediately sent to the top of the queue to be automatically processed. Not my idea, let me tell you. They stop using these in the early days because of how much trouble you can cause, but here we are with "Esther Roberts" trying to check out every file we had on the Timepiece. I say "Esther Roberts," and you can't see it, but I'm doing air quotes. It's not from her office, it's not her usual workflow. Someone got ahold of her correspondence code. I've been seeing that pop up in a few places it shouldn't along this iteration... the first one got through, but the second request on Timepiece derivatives and all of our research on Butterfly Syndrome and everything on... those kids, I was able to stop. But only by shutting the whole thing down. Hopefully it'll only have to be for a little while, and no one on the outside will notice a thing.

[[SFX: radio tuning; Lou, Bridget and Petra explore Hank Cornish's house]]

LG: –working?

BC: Yeah, it's on, I had to change the battery.

PM: Is the recorder really necessary? I thought the joke was that you guys were all under insane levels of surveillance... There's gotta be at least a few mics in Cornish's house.

BC: I checked the reels. I thought they were fine, until I heard him have the exact same phone conversation on three separate occasions. He fed us a loop.

PM: [scoff] Amateur hour. If it was me, you never would have noticed.

LG: [laugh] Good to know I can't trust any evidence you leave behind.

PM: You certainly can't!

LG: [laughs]

BC: Oh god, that means they could be anywhere!

PM: I know it sounds scary, but we stay vigilant.

BC: Who's we? We're untethered from an earlier ODAR that could have stopped him. Soviet spies could be anywhere! Lurking, scheming! Amelin almost killed Esther, and Hank Cornish was five minutes away from actually succeeding. And Sally's next-door neighbor is somehow involved! Is everyone in Point-of-Exile an enemy spy? The Soviets have a Timepiece and they're free to just sow destruction wherever they want! Next, they'll frame me for

racketeering! Sally gets twenty-five to life for tax evasion! What are we supposed to do when we can't even trust our own history?

PM: Hey, Bridget, can I...? You know what, it's going to be okay.

[[SFX: Petra walks over and hugs Bridget]]

BC: Is it?

PM: *[whispering]* I'm going to tell the others about what happened. They'll do something.

BC: *[whispering]* I'm sorry, what did you say?

PM: You heard me.

BC: Are you still in contact with–

PM: Not now.

BC: You can't just tell me that–

PM: It isn't the right time.

[[SFX: Meanwhile, Lou finds a false panel in a bookshelf]]

LG: Hey, I've got something! False panel in the bookshelf!

BC: Huh.

PM: *[normal volume]* What's in there?

[[SFX: Lou starts pulling sheets of paper from the hidden compartment]]

LG: A couple passports, these are, blueprints?

PM: This one is for the Timepiece. This is the CAGE...

LG: There are entrance logs, memos...

BC: They've got everything.

LG: This... This can't the only cache in here. He's got to have more secrets.

[[SFX: Footsteps. The three pace around the room, and periodically step on a false panel in the floor.]]

PM: Hey, Bridget, hold on a second.

BC: Yes?

[[SFX: Petra walks over to Bridget and tests the floor around her. It makes the same hollow shifting noise.]]

PM: Step off this rug?

BC: Oh, uh, ok...

[[SFX: Bridget steps off the rug; Petra peels it away to reveal a hidden trapdoor underneath]]

PM: Hah! Gotcha. Crowbar?

LG: Mmm, here you go.

[[SFX: Lou passes Petra the crowbar; she pries the trapdoor up]]

PM: Jackpot! I'm gonna climb in to see if there's anything else in the foundation.

[[SFX: Petra jumps down into the bowels of the house; Bridget takes one of the document bundles and leafs through]]

LG: What do you have there?

BC: I'm not sure yet... it's from the Blackroom, but it's not ODAR. "Justification for U.S. Military Intervention in Cuba. Top Secret."

PM: *[under the house]* I'm sorry, did you say Cub–

[[SFX: Petra thunks her head on the floorboards]]

PM: ...OW.

LG: Wait a minute, why go to war with Batista? He's too small a target.

PM: Yeah, but it's not about him. A lot changes between now and then.

[[SFX: Petra climbs out of the hole.]]

PM: For one, the revolution succeeds in overthrowing his regime.

BC: Good. The last thing the world needs is another dictator.

PM: And then the new Marxist government cozies up to the USSR.

LG: Wait, Cuba's a strategic ally. 100 miles off the coast of Florida.

PM: And that brings us to Operation Northwoods. The CIA stages a fake attack on a fake civilian plane carrying fake Americans, and blames it on Cuba. Or they assassinate some Cuban expats. Or sink a naval ship off Guantanamo Bay.

BC: I "remember the Maine."

PM: Whatever it takes to justify war.

LG: Jesus, Mary Joseph... another war with Cuba.

PM: They were just plans. Only the wildest dreams of paranoid patriots... in my timeline.

BC: So who knows what happens to us?

LG: Yeah, and if Hank knew about this, that means the Soviets do too.

BC: What is the diplomatic response... when your adversary proposes to attack an ally you don't even have yet?

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

AP: So, it's been three days and I still don't have a good answer. Still can't talk in or out either. Not like there's a lot of people to talk to out there. Even my back channel to Sally is down. I suppose the good news is that if this goes on much longer, Chet can't send me any more haunting reminders of my past mistakes. The bad news is, I've been spending my time running some predictive simulations and, with ODAR's data out in the wild like that, things get worse. I'm waiting for the results to finish processing, but here's a few picks out of the early predictions:

[[SFX: Anthony picks up a sheet of paper]]

AP: A 71% chance of severe economic downturn within eighteen months, a 28% increase in the likelihood of violence against VIPs, and get this: Communist insurrection in South Vietnam.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

AP: The results were worse than I predicted! ODAR secrets in the hands of the Soviets would make direct conflict between NATO and Warsaw Pact forces practically inevitable. The predicted death toll is enormous, soldier and civilian alike. If I turned that transmitter back on, the packet containing all the data goes out, arrives at the specified time, there's some geopolitical turmoil, the superpowers go to war! Sure, I could restart the transmitter, maybe save a few variations on the timeline from mutually assured destruction, but you know what?! Maybe Chet doesn't get to keep his fancy communications nexus when using it is going to lead to the end of the world!

[[SFX: radio tuning; Chet types a letter in his office; Amelia enters]]

AMELIA ARNAULT (AA): Director Whickman, can you sign these discharge papers for Ms. Roberts?

CHET WHICKMAN (CW): I'll be right with you, Amelia.

[[SFX: phone rings; Chet steps typing to answer; the other side is unheard]]

CW: Yes? Of course, sir. I'll send it over immediately. Yes, sir. It's been an honor.

[[SFX: Chet hangs up]]

CW: One minute.

[[SFX: Chet finishes typing, pulls out the letter, then Timepieces it away]]

CW: Okay, bring it here.

[[SFX: Amelia approaches and hands Chet the documents to sign, which he does]]

AA: Wh...What was–

CW: And... there. My last act as Director.

AA: Sir?

CW: I signed my resignation letter eight minutes ago.

AA: Resignation?!

CW: My position for Esther's life. That was the deal. And an agreement that I go off somewhere deep into the wilderness and never return... I couldn't let her die. Not after everything I've done. Not after... everything.

AA: And the Timepiece?

CW: The day I got this job, after Donovan died, a letter appeared on my desk, about right here, right about where this Timepiece is, and it told me how long I had, here in this job. Right down to the minute. 14:25.

AA: Actually, the time is 14:32.

CW: Huh. I bought myself seven minutes.

AA: An admirable gain, sir.

CW: Is it? Why? ODAR has been the last ten years of my life. Probably the last twelve if you count off-calendar. And what have I accomplished? Have I made us any better? Have I saved the world yet?

AA: I don't know sir.

CW: That makes two of us, I suppose.

AA: I, er... forgive me, sir, I don't mean to come off as selfish, or... Should I start packing my desk?

CW: I can't imagine they'd want to get rid of you. You know where all the bodies are buried.

AA: [chuckles] Well, I don't actually... no, nevermind, I do know a few.

CW: Hopefully, my successor will put you to good use. You've performed impeccably. Every extra second I earned is because of you. Thank you for your time, Amelia.

AM: It's been an honor, sir.

CW: I'm not sure it was.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

AP: So it's been three months. The Blackroom has been down for twelve whole weeks, and I am LOVING it! I don't think I've had a real vacation since I got to the Blackroom, and I don't think I took one the entire time I was at ODAR. I'm retired, bay-bee! I mean, the rations aren't any better, but I can finally relax! And I can probably play Tee-tris forever!

[[SFX: Gameboy turning on; radio tuning; Tetris victory music]]

AP: Well, I beat Tee-tris.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

AP: So I've been tinkering with the Tetris cartridge, and I've completely rebuilt the randomizer to increase the number of unhelpful pieces and decrease the number of frames per row. I'm calling the new game "Tony's Blocks." It'll make for a far more difficult game! It should probably keep me going for–

[[SFX: radio tuning; Tetris victory music]]

AP: Well, I beat Tony's Blocks.

[[SFX: Anthony turns off the Gameboy]]

AP: Hmm... What if I–

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

AP: Nope. Beat that too.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

AP: Two years without contact with the outside. How we doin? [manic giggling] Cracking up maybe a little? Eh, who can tell... Exercise regimen in tact, through what can only be a will as strong as Damascus steel! I've already burned through most of my books and media. It's not like I could just call up some new titles with a Catbox... actually, now that I think about it...

[[SFX: radio tuning; Anthony opening wooden crates with a crowbar]]

AP: Now, you see, in some other version of reality, I made requests to ODAR HQ and they put them in these boxes. I never got the chance. Let's see what I was going to ask for.

[[SFX: he pries the boxes open one by one]]

AP: Well, we've got what looks like a new oxygen recycler in this one, always handy. In here, there's some more books, that's good, a couple more Game Boy games, thank the Lord. Then we've got a copy of The Stand. Didn't I already have one of those? The cover's different. Maybe it's an edition from a different timeline.

And next one? Huh. There's a tiny little doohickey in here. I wonder what it...

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

AP: Alright, so our final haul includes the backup oxygen recycler, the replacement record player, more books, more games, the curdled milk (can't believe I thought that would work), the suit, and this little... it looks like a magnetic storage device. Let's see what's on it...

[[SFX: Anthony plugs the device in, then types on the computer keyboard to access it]]

AP: Huh. It's a computer program. For processing and editing audio, it looks like. I asked for this? Specifically this? That's... an absurdly specific call to adventure.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

SG: Diary of Sally Grissom, May 25th, 1953. I didn't expect Cornish to be a mole. A snake? Of course. It's not like Cornish was, like, the most trustworthy person, but the twist is never supposed to be the aggressive dick who's been responsible for like, 40% of my problems since I met him. Fucked up my arm real good, too.

The blanks that Hank Cornish left behind posit even more questions. They ransacked his house, and, you know, found out that he was informing the Soviets, and got all those documents... but nothing about what happened to the Blackroom! I had assumed that Partridge's untimely silence was Cornish or Vasilievich or Ida or SOMETHING connected to the USSR. But right now, it's just a big blank. A huge, open, question mark.

There’s a... there's a pretty grim option here. And I don’t want to think about it, but I’ve gotta seriously consider the possibility that... Partridge is dead. I mean, if you look at it from any other vantage point than the weird one that I’ve got, then yes, he dies on October 28, 1943. I know that there’s some death gas alarm failsafe somewhere, but... But what if it broke? What if the Soviets disabled the Blackroom some other way? I mean, there could’ve been a fight or something in there, and I’d never know. And I’d be really mad that Partridge would let me miss something so cool. Also, you know... he’s gone. He’s gone and he’s never coming back, and I’ll never know why. And that sucks. I mean, I don’t... I don’t think I “deserve” something, or whatever, but... I just assumed he’d be there, forever. He wasn’t here, but... he was safe. And I’ll never get to know... *[on the verge of tears]*

Fortunately, with real, verifiable Soviet agents on our hands, there was more than enough evidence to exonerate Esther. Of course, it’s never that easy. They had deep hooks in her. But she’s coming back, and that’s the important part. I guess I’ve lost one dear friend, and saved another.

[[SFX: A knock on Sally's door]]

SG: [sniff] One second.

[[SFX: Sally gets up and answers the door]]

SG: Petra? What do you want?

PM: Hey, I uh, um... I got a package that I think is for you.

SG: What does that mean?

PM: [sigh] It's a long story, I'll tell you about it some other time. Um, most of them are encrypted, I haven't cracked it yet, but... I think you'll want to listen to this one.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

AP: I’ve been busy. Back at ODAR, when I worked for the Predictive Mechanics department, I thought we were going to be able to peer into the future as simply as a spyglass with little more than a spreadsheet. Of course, my hopes of perfect clairvoyance were dashed after Sally appeared over there. But I’ve had a lot of time since then to think. And work.

[[SFX: the audio distorts and picks up later in the tape, static obstructing throughout]]

AP: ...and with the reconstructed sociopolitical heuristics there’s a standard 50-60 point improvement in accuracy across the board for timeline mutations A-G, and despite the abnormal agricultural stochasticity in mutation H I was able to get 198 points, a professional best, if I say so myself. Of course, when you combine it with the pattern weighting method I outlined earlier in this tape, you’ll see that the results are even more pronounced...

[[SFX: static overtakes the tape, then recedes]]

AP: ...The point is, I now have a toolbox where I could craft what comes next. Everything that comes next, actually. I'm targeting a timeline. Your timeline, if I've done my job right, which I know I have. One where my legacy survives. If you're listening to this, then you've made it to the end. Well, an end. My end.

[[SFX: radio tuning; a distant buzzer; a distant door slams shut; footsteps approach down a long gravel path]]

BC: I thought you'd never show up.

ESTHER ROBERTS (ER): Paperwork issue. I'm all sorted.

[[SFX: a pause]]

BC: Sally's in the car.

SG: *[behind glass]* Hi Roberts!

BC: ...I don't think they ever planned on letting you out.

ER: I know. And I won't soon forget. But here I am now, a free woman... As free as we can ever be.

BC: Ettie, come here.

[[SFX: Bridget takes Esther in her arms; they kiss]]

BC: I missed you.

[[SFX: Esther breathes softly; the moment hangs in the air; then, they break their embrace, they walk around and get into the car]]

SG: Yeah, that's right, got Roberts out of jail! WOOOOO! Alright, who wants ice cream?

ER: ...You know, I was hoping for whiskey, but now that you say it out loud, yes. That is exactly what I want. Can I scream? Can I scream for ice cream?

SG: Scream as loud as you want for as long as you want! You're going home.

[[SFX: Esther whoops and laughs as the car drives away; radio tuning]]

AP: So you are listening to the archive–just about every single tape that's crossed my desk from 1943 to 1993. I've got discarded pasts, unrealized futures, and messy presents. It's almost done, actually. All I have to do is finish this recording.

I'm sorry if this wasn't what you expected. I'm sorry if you wanted more answers. I didn't want to be put in this position. But if this is the grenade I must jump on, so be it. I've been a dead man walking since I got in here. I can take this last one for the team. My team. If you're wondering why the Blackroom stopped working, it was because of treason and a software bug. I saved the world and nobody'll ever know. Well, you will. Because you heard it.

Anyway, this is my last communication. Once I send out the archive, my little corner of nowhere has no way of contacting out. I've accepted my fate. I hope you can too. Least I'll die in a suit.

Oh, and Sally? Sally Grissom? If you end up hearing this, somehow? Thanks for sticking by me. Even at my lowest point, you stayed. You made me believe that... maybe someone could do some good with this. I think... there are worse people who could have invented time travel. I'm glad it was you.

[[SFX: radio tuning; Timepiece spooling up in the ODAR workshop]]

HC: I've always hated you, you know that?

SG: What else is new?

HC: You were always a thorn in my ass, but not this time! This time you can't stop me!

[[SFX: Timepiece activates]]

HC: Woah!

[[SFX: Hank splashes down into the ocean; he breaches for air once, then is dragged under; he struggles to surface, to breathe, but to no avail. He drowns. Underwater bubbling gives way to the surf, lapping against the shore. Then, in the distance:]]

CW: Director Donovan! I found another body!

[[SFX: tape recorder stops]]

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ars PARADOXICA was created by Daniel Manning & Mischa Stanton. Season 3 was also written by Eli Barraza, Julian Mundy, Danielle Shemaiah & Tau Zaman.
Episode 28: Adversary features –

Kristen DiMercurio (Sally Grissom)
Katie Speed (Esther Roberts)
Lia Peros (Petra)
L. Jeffrey Moore (Lou Gaines)
Preston Allen (Bridget Chambers)
Reyn Beeler (Chet Whickman)
Dan Anderson (Hank Cornish)

Robin Gabbrielli (Anthony Partridge)
Maxximillian Dafoe (Ida)
Isabel Atkinson (Amelia)

Production help from Dennis Connors. Original music by Mischa Stanton and by Eno Freedman-Brodmann.
ars PARADOXICA is brought to you by The Internet: Hack the planet. Hack the planet.

07 17 05 05 19 12 09 12 23 23 01 19 24 14 26 16 13 11 15 13
14 04 15 14 04 09 11 14 26 15 23 07 15 04 07 21
WEATHER IN MEMPHIS: SWELTERING
TIME: 6600

29: Odyssey

WRITTEN BY TAU ZAMAN
DIRECTED & SOUND DESIGN BY MISCHA STANTON

[[tape recorder starts; Sally & Nikhil push their car]]

SALLY GRISSOM (SG): [panting] Almost there! Just need to...turn it into the gas station and...push it up next to a pump!

NIKHIL SHARMA (NS): Sally, I think you can take it from here...

SG: Oh, no you don't! You're pushing this ding-dang car with me to the bitter end!

NS: But my arms hurt! And my legs...

SG: Maybe we'd have more gas in this lemon if you didn't need us to pull into every tourist trap on the way. You wanted a road trip! Here it is.

NS: Fine, fine. There's no better road trip bonding exercise than some good old-fashioned manual labor!

SG: I'm already gonna regret this trip, aren't I. [to other people at the gas stop] Hi, yes, hello, don't mind us, just pushing through.

[[SFX: they push the car up to the pump; the service bell dings. Sally refuels the car.]]

NS: Whew! That's all the exercise I'll need until we get to Point-of-Exile. Maybe even a little while after.

SG: Tell me about it. [to the car] I'm sorry I only fixed your gas line after half the tank leaked out.

NS: Road tripping halfway across the US with a stranger from the future is brave of you, I'll admit.

SG: You're gonna murder me on this trip, huh?

NS: Hardly. I would've taken my chance last night.

SG: A-ha! So that was your master plan. Seduce me and then murder me in cold blood!

NS: Hah, no. I'm, ah, sorry about that last night. I was...forward, and....

SG: No worries, Sharma. To be honest, I don't get that a lot. It's just a little surprising when I do.

NS: A lady like you doesn't get much attention?

SG: That too, but more like I don't seek it out much. Or ever.

NS: Oh Sally, I'm mortified. I completely misread that, I thought you might've been interested—

SG: Nah. I'm ace. It's–and I literally could not stress this enough–it's nothing personal. I'm sure you must clean up back in 20[redacted].

NS: Like I said, not much left for me there.

SG: No one left either, huh.

NS: Well, there was someone...

SG: You left someone to came all the way back here? I've gotta know that story,

NS: Now this is embarrassing.

SG: Excuse me? Last night you were all, [sultry voice] "Dr. Grissom, let's give your recorder a break." And I shot you down! What else have you got to lose?

NS: Hey! I've just met you! And this is crazy!

SG: Mister "there's no better bonding exercise...."

NS: Alright, alright. There's...another field agent back in ODAR headquarters. I only really started getting to know him just before getting sent back here, though.

SG: Him...

NS: Is that a problem?

SG: No! Just, um, it's been a while. You're definitely from the 21st century. Do you miss him?

NS: I do. He's the one who showed me who you were, actually.

SG: That much you do remember. But your mission from future-ODAR?

NS: Uhm, that part is still...erm, hazy.

SG: Sure it is.

[[SFX: Sally finishes refueling and replaces the pump; Sally stops the recorder]]

SG: Diary of Sally Grissom. June 5th, 1953. Not much happening today. Just playing back some old tapes.

[[SFX: She listlessly rewinds and fast-forwards the recorder]]

SG: I'm supposed to talk to someone when I get like this. But seeing as Dr. Fitzgerald is the only licensed mental health professional in this two-horse town, and like... no thank you... these tapes are all I've got, so.

[[SFX: More nihilistic button pressing, fast-forwarding, rewinding, with abrupt stops.]]

SG: Whickman resigned last week. But not just resigned, he's... pretty much retired. I don't think he'll ever be happy working anywhere else. It's like all the light left his eyes when he stepped down. What's Whickman without ODAR? I don't think even he knows. The way he walked out of there that day...it was bummer-town.

Oh yeah, guess where he's staying? Ida's old house. He insists it's temporary 'til he finds some place to go. That's right: from Petty Officer to Most Powerful Man in the World to My Next Door Neighbor, living out the rest of his days doing...what, exactly? Whatever it is, I hope he takes his time with it. think the higher-ups are just happy to have him out of their hair while they look for a replacement.

...I doubt he's staying out of it though. Whickman's been working on... something and I dunno what. I haven't exactly brought him a new neighbor custard since he moved in. He just looks... sick whenever I see him running in the morning. I figured he wanted space. But...[finding an excuse to be nosy] high time I said hello, right? I should check on him. I'll bring over a...a get-well-soup. With some carrots from the garden.

[[SFX: tape fast-forward; Sally cutting carrots for soup]]

SG: –Not to mention he basically he was forced to resign at the worst time possible for ODAR. Why he did; I think only Amelia knows, which I can understand. But we're under attack on all fronts. We might've caught Cornish, and I guess Ida, but we still haven't found Vasilievich.

And of course there's the whole Blackroom Farewell Tour, with an audience of one: me. Partridge's tape got me on this melancholy nostalgia kick anyway. To think he's just... gone. I mean, technically he was already long-gone; he lived out the rest of his days at a fixed point outside of time a decade ago. But it's hard to know that you've heard the last of him. I still haven't decided if I'm going to break it to ODAR. I know he said he saved us all without owing anything to us, but...knowing him? Part of me thinks he'd still want everyone to know he saved us.

Did he, though? Partridge said he shut down a transfer of our files to the Soviets from a mole.... But they still got a Timepiece. Even if they didn't get everything they wanted, there's literally-not-figuratively an infinite amount

of things they can mess with. Not the least of which is, they can come back and take what they want, and we might not even see it happening.

Chambers said they were after the records of the Plasticity experiments, the whole process that made Petra and the rest of them. Now that Roberts has vowed never to let that happen, our records on them are apocryphal at best. Only whatever we could get from the Blackroom before this whole fiasco started. Or whatever Petra knows. I'm actually surprised they haven't... I dunno, come for her or something.

Now that I think about it... there are even easier targets, if that's what Russia's after. We haven't heard from the Anchorites since they ran off, it's been sort of this unspoken truce. But that also means we wouldn't know if something happened to them, if the Soviets came for them. I'm sure Carmen or Maggie Elbourne could make up for some of the knowledge we don't have. Hell, even the good Family Barlowe would be worth taking a look at. Jeez. I really hope they're ok.

Sometimes I wonder what Barlowe and Quigley are up to. Did they just, drive off into the sunset? Live their best lives? Did they say — fuck causality, fuck the laws of time, fuck whatever we remember, let's just live how we wanna live, now?

I'm glad they got away, for as long as they could. Not all of us were meant for it, after all.

At least I'm alive.

[[SFX: Sally plops the carrots into the soup, then presses play on the recorder with a sigh]]

SG: *(on tape)* Diary of Sally Grissom, November 1st, 1949. We'll be at Point-of-Exile in the morning. If everything goes according to plan, tomorrow I'll be...home. Actually home. Real home.

[[SFX: point of view fades to inside the car with Sally and Nikhil, 1949. The Carter Family's *Are You Lonesome Tonight*, a twangy country tune, plays from the radio]]

NS: Just like in the road trip movies.

SG: I'm gonna miss everyone.

NS: You've made friends here?

SG: I...don't know if I'd call them friends.

NS: All these years with them, and you're not sure?

SG: I mean, of course they're my friends. I like them. They're very, um, competent. Good people. Working for a good cause. But, you know, when you

think of best friends, don't you picture people you're excited to see? People you can confide in, people who make you feel good about yourself? No one's like that here. Everyone here, they're my friends, but I wonder if it's because that's 'cause they're also...all I've got? I care about them, a lot, but. I don't know. It's not what I picture when you say "friends."

NS: You made do with what you had.

SG: I'm like you, I guess. There wasn't much back for me in 20[redacted]. At least you had a boyfriend. Mateo sounds adorable by the way.

NS: He is.

SG: You're right, I don't. But, you and I, we haven't, you know, done anything, but—

NS: Yes, keep reminding me—

SG: But we're still friends, right? I think that this all counts for something. I dunno, we've only been together a short time, but, I've...had a lot of fun with you, Sharma.

NS: Awwww, I love you too, Sally!

SG: Come on I'm trying to be serious here. I'm saying —

NS: Friendships are just as meaningful as romance, I'm saying the same thing you are!

SG: Exactly! I wish people saw that more. But then again, love makes you do crazy things. Have I told you about Partridge? Man, what a mess. Even Jack Wyatt running off with Penny Wise. Am I... am I ever gonna care about someone that much?

NS: Definitely that much, maybe just not that... way . You can still love someone without, you know. Loving them.

SG: Ha, ha. Did you...did you tell Mateo you love him?

NS: I did. Doesn't make it any easier being apart.

[[SFX: The music on the radio fades to static, and a device starts clicking]]

SG: Hey, whaddya have there?

NS: Don't worry about it!

[[SFX: Nikhil covers the device; Sally turns off the radio]]

SG: Partridge had one of those. A targeted broadcast identifier. We used it to track tachyon emissions.

NS: It’s nothing, really. You don’t want to know.

SG: Now I definitely want to know.

NS: It’s, um, similar to what you described. This is a location regulator. I used it to keep my Timepiece's geolocator accurate over a long series of jumps.

SG: Your Timepiece that’s...defunct in the ocean now, gathering barnacles and getting picked at by fish probably?

NS: That one. Just thought maybe I could repurpose this piece somehow.

SG: Any luck?

NS: No, sadly.

SG: Then why’s it sounding off?

NS: I.... I don't know. They’re more sensitive in our time. Can pick up stray tachyon emissions within twenty tera-electron volts of center. No interference or anything.

SG: So just like Partridge’s broadcast identifier. For like...cosmic, tachyonic background radiation.

NS: Here and there, yes, but really, it’s negligible. Nothing for us out here but black night and endless highway. Spooky if you think about it too long.

SG: Probably for the best. Even spookier would be if out here in the dark we picked out some kinda ghost radio station sending out tachyon emissions.

NS: ...I’d like that, actually.

[[SFX: the clicking device slows to a stop]]

SG: Don’t get me wrong—it gets lonely out here, yeah. Part of me thought, maybe this is where I’m meant to be. I mean, not meant like some kind of divine purpose, but this is where I’d be...useful. This was where I could do something great, and sure, if people ended up liking me for it too, that wouldn’t be so bad.

NS: You don’t think they appreciate you.

SG: Well. They know I’m useful, that much is for sure.

NS: And they know you’re smart.

SG: Which I already know. All I’m saying is, whether I go back to the future or just back to Point-of-Exile, I wonder if it’s all kind of the same. Just more and more hello-how-do-you-do’s day after day.

NS: Hey, you'll have me. And yes, if you're wondering if we can be, how do they say it, "BFFs" after a few days on a road trip, the answer is yes.

SG: Alright, enough, you win. I'm going back with you.

NS: For what it's worth, you're considered a legend back in my version of our time.

SG: I don't feel legendary. Do I....do I end up doing something more than just accidentally inventing time travel?

NS: Spoilers, spoilers...

SG: Dammit!

[[SFX: point of view fades back to Sally in 1953; she rewinds the tape and plays back a section]]

NS: *(on tape)* For what it's worth, you're considered a legend back in my version of our time.

SG: *(on tape)* I don't feel legendary.

[[SFX: Sally stops the tape]]

SG: I invented freaking time travel. What the hell else am I gonna do that's legendary? First Wyatt, then Nikhil, then Partridge, now Whickman...all these lonely, brilliant men vanishing into the margins of history because of me. I couldn't save one of them.

[[SFX: She rewinds the tape again, then stops. A long pause, then deep breath: resolute.]]

SG: No. I've still got Whickman. And I'm not gonna lose him.

[[SFX: radio tuning; Sally walks up to Chet's house and knocks on the door eagerly; it opens]]

SG: Petra?!

PETRA MARQUEZ (PM): Sally.

SG: What're you doing at Whickman's place?

PM: Leaving. Have a good one.

[[SFX: Petra walks away; Chet calls from inside the house]]

CHET WHICKMAN (CW): Sally, is that you?

SG: [as she enters] Hey Whickman, how's it– jeez. Whickman. You look terrible.

CW: I'm fine, I -- [He sneezes.]

SG: Well, you were bound to catch a cold sooner or later running around so early in the morning.

CW: What do you need, Sally?

SG: I dunno, I wanted to check how retirement was going.

CW: I appreciate the concern, but I can handle a little head cold on my own. anything else?

SG: Yeah, I'd like you to fill me in on your last play at ODAR before you leave town. [pause] Give me a little credit, Whickman, I know you a bit better than that.

CW: Sally, I'm just a civilian now. Really,

SG: And I'm supposed to believe that transition has been just blissful! And restful! With absolutely no temptation to keep working, even as as a civilian!

CW: I meant that you don't have to call me Whickman.

SG: Yes, I do. You clearly don't know me very well.

CW: I'm just Chet now.

SG: I never call people by their first names.

CW: Yes you do.

SG: Who? Oh...Nikhil.

CW: And me, and Esther, sometimes.

SG: When I'm mad. Like calling a kid by their middle name, I guess.

CW: And yes, since you so gingerly asked, I've managed to make use of all this...time I suddenly have. I might've stayed up a few too many nights and caught a runny nose.

SG: So, what're you working on? Who do you think is gonna replace you? What's your plan to track down the Soviet—

CW: Sally, that's really not my concern anymore—

SG: How the hell do they have a Timepiece? You're gonna expect ODAR to just keep running as normal while they can overwrite all of our work?

CW: Will you keep your voice down?! Even if everyone knows about the Soviets by now, what can a civilian like me do about it?

SG: I'm telling you it'll get worse if you don't get help. And I mean help tracking down the Soviet spies but also —

[[SFX: Chet interrupts to have another coughing fit]]

SG: But also help with... that. Whickman, you're coughing up blood. Are you seeing someone for that?

CW: I will, later. We've got the best doctors in the country, Sally, which means we've got the best doctors in the world. I think I'll manage.

SG: So you admit you've been putting it off because you're, what...playing crosswords? Sitting on your porch in a rocking chair with a gun? Why won't you just admit you're still on the hunt? And making yourself sick while you're at it.

CW: What do you want me to do, Sally, ask the Blackroom if there's a cure for the common cold? Don't bother, I'd probably get better answers from a Magic 8 Ball. "Outlook Not so good. Better not to tell you now. Reply hazy try again." All more substantive answers than we've gotten from him.

SG: Are you saying the Blackroom wasn't just Partridge shaking a Magic 8 Ball to begin with?

[[SFX: they laugh, Chet painfully so]]

SG: Seriously though, Partridge was a lifeline. We have to prepare ourselves to...never hear from him again. Maybe.

CW: That ship sailed a long while back, Sally.. I don't work at ODAR anymore after all. Let whomever they hire to replace me solve that mystery.

SG: Whickman, can you look me right in the eyes and seriously tell me you're not...I don't know, figuring out how to take over ODAR again or keep it running behind the scenes?

CW: Sally, I swear to you: I am not. And you don't work for me anymore, so I'm really looking forward to not putting up with...no offense, but, well, all your shenanigans.

SG: Ouch. And here I thought we were gonna be neighbors.

CW: I knew when I was going to be done with this job. I have a place to go and a plan to get there. I'm almost recovered and I'll be gone any minute.

SG: And...then what? I'll just never see you again?

CW: I figured you'd be thrilled. What else do you need from me Sally?

SG: I dunno, I thought maybe when you were done playing God I could actually relate to you as, well, a regular human person or something.

CW: You wanted to be friends?

SG: I just thought you could finally tell me things you maybe couldn't! There's so much I still don't know about you. Like why you've had an eyepatch all these years! You look like some Bond villain! Which, given the job, is kind of a look, I'll admit. But did you poke your eye out or something?

CW: I'm never explaining the eyepatch, Sally. It's for your own good.

SG: How that's even the case is ridiculous enough to drive me crazy!

CW: Sally, I can't just turn around and be your best friend, all right? We had a nice time during the lockdown, but that was just... That's not how things are, between us. There's just too much history for that. And I think you and I... disagree on too many things. I'm never gonna be to you what Sharma was, okay? Don't force it.

SG: Wow. Turns out you're a jerk even without the job. Fine. Have a good life, Whickman.

[[SFX: She huffs exasperatedly and storms out, slamming the door behind her. A pause, then she immediately opens it again. She plops a soup pot on the floor.]]

SG: And eat this goddamn soup!

CW: *(calling out)* I was wondering what you were carrying that whole time!

[[SFX: radio tuning; the generator building; Esther is taking measurements and writing them on a clipboard]]

SG: ...and then he told me, [in her best Chet impression] "I'm never gonna be what Sharma was to you." That's how he decided to leave things, before he left for good, to god-knows-where. He didn't even give me back my soup pot. Can you believe that?!

ESTHER ROBERTS (ER): *[distracted]* Yeah, that's just awful.

SG: Really, Roberts?

ER: Sorry, I'm just trying to concentrate. I've only been back a week and I'm already swimming in work to catch up on.

SG: Can't talk to even one person...

ER: Sally, of course you can talk to me!

SG: What does it say when I kinda miss your visits back in the old days when all you wanted was to play-cards-with-slash-spy-on-me. At least you paid attention then.

ER: Sally, I'm paying attention now! I just also have a job to do, we can't just hop in a car and go on some road trip right now like gal pals.

SG: ...That's low. You too, Roberts?

ER: Wait, no, I didn't mean—

SG: You did mean that kind of road trip.

ER: Not off the top of my head I didn't, but...it's not wrong.

SG: What are you talking about?

ER: I know you think about him, that's all.

SG: Sorry for caring about my friends.

ER: Sally, you knew him for what, a matter of days? Hours? You've known me for a decade. But you ditched me in New York to travel across the country with him. And when you got back you were ready to burn this whole thing down and build another anchor point. Whatever kind of very brief, very intense friendship you had with Sharma... it's more than we can wrap our minds around, Sally. It's just damn hard to give you what you want. That's all Chet was probably trying to say too.

SG: Roberts, if I can be totally honest, you haven't been good to me.

ER: I know, and I'm sorry—

SG: Lemme finish. You haven't been good to me, but. You're all I've got here. You're kind of my...

ER: Best friend?

SG: Very good friend. For better or worse. If it sounds like you're hurt, of course I'm gonna come help.

ER: I'm glad you can call me a friend, Sally. You know, the night of the incident, at the prison... The doctors said if you had come even a few minutes later, I probably wouldn't even be speaking to you right now.

SG: I heard. Those few minutes mean everything. Trust me, I know. I watched Nikhil die in my arms. [beat] Listen. We've been through a lot together, and I want to keep you as a friend, but if we're going to make this work? I really think we need to lay down some ground rules, okay?

ER: Oookay?

SG: Number one: you don't use me. That's just not something friends do, okay? I don't care how much the fate of the universe rests in your hands on some Machiavellian gambit you've got up your sleeve, you tell me upfront what you want and need from me. Got it?

ER: ...Fair enough.

SG: And-and-addendum! Don't use other people! No more using Petra for her plasticity. And you never, ever, sign off on the Plasticity experiments. Leave the kids alone, okay?

ER: I feel like I've made it pretty clear I'm against that, but that's...less up to me and more up to the new director, at this point. But easy enough to agree to for now.

SG: Number two: I might work for you but you used to work for me too. We're friends first; you don't order me around, capiche?

ER: I mean, on paper, I'm still gonna have to be your boss, but—

SG: I said, capiche?

ER: Okay, fine!

SG: Number three. We actually spend time together. And talk about things. As friends, not at work. Once a week, at least.

ER: You're a demanding friend, Sally.

SG: You're just not used to having a real one, Roberts.

ER: That...stings, but seeing how the ethics investigation went, I can't contest it.

SG: I'm sorry how that played out. I wish I—

ER: I don't have time to agonize over it. I have more important stuff to do.

SG: Like...

ER: Keeping the world spinning, Sally.

SG: ...That's my Roberts. Cards this weekend?

ER: I'm...not sure. We're going to have a new director any minute, and...

SG: No worries. I got it. Not like we're gal pals or anything. I'll leave you to it.

[[SFX: Sally leaves, crestfallen]]

ER: You can come in now.

[[SFX: Petra enters]]

PM: "Never" using me for my plasticity again, huh. That's rich.

[[SFX: Petra puts a Timepiece down on the worktable]]

ER: Petra, I promise you this really will be the last time I ask you to time travel, ever.

PM: But you still want to keep that from Sally.

ER: I figured you would want to save him!

PM: I do! I don't understand why you would.

ER: Sharma is our only resource from a future where a Soviet equivalent to ODAR exists. He may be the only one with any intel on how to stop them. Short of the Blackroom, which we don't seem to have anymore.

PM: Sally of all people would want him back too.

ER: We *can't* tell Sally about this.

PM: Why, 'cause she'll get Butterfly Syndrome? Can't relate, sorry.

ER: In Sally's memory, Sharma has died. If we change that, we overwrite everything that's led to who she is now.

PM: How am I gonna save him then?

ER: First, you're going to let him get shot. Sally needs to hold him in her arms. She was just telling me about what that felt like. That memory has to stay. But that would mean...he dies.

PM: So when Sally gets escorted out, I'll only have a few seconds to come in on the scene and try to revive him.

ER: Well... Chet's still gonna be there by the body. And he'll probably try to attack you, too.

PM: Somehow I doubt he'll miss?

ER: He won't. He practices. You'll have to disarm him somehow.

PM: I've already got that part figured out.

ER: Really? How?

PM: Don't worry about it. What's next?

ER: I would really prefer to know–

PM: Esther — I've got this. And if you need me you can't twist my arm on it.

ER: Fine, well, if you somehow survive the bullet...

PM: That probably only buys me a few more seconds to explain what's going on.

ER: You'll have to get his trust quickly if you don't want him to fire again.

PM: Chet's...kind of notoriously stubborn if you haven't noticed.

ER: I know, it'd be nigh on impossible to convince him unless...

PM: The only person Chet would believe in the heat of the moment is Chet.

ER: If we can convince present Chet to send a message with you back to past Chet, something only he would recognize...

PM: He'd have to believe it's an order from his future self.

ER: Exactly. Can you get that from him?

PM: Can't you?

ER: Well, he's left Point-of-Exile. And I can't have my hands anywhere near this operation; we're under watch as it is and I'm going to have new supervision any moment. I might already. So the only way to talk to him now would be...

PM: [sigh] time travel.

ER: ...Yes.

[[SFX: Petra types coordinates into the Timepiece and begins the startup process]]

PM: "I promise this will be the last time I ask you to time travel, Petra — ever! Just maybe also a handful more times on top of that!"

ER: And then you're done. I swear.

PM: ...I expect a sizable pay raise.

[[SFX: The Timepiece activates, sending Petra back in time; a brief pause, and then Petra re-enters]]

ER: Well that was fast. What was his message?

PM: Something dumb. We doing this or what?

ER: You'll need to save him but you can't come back to ODAR with him. At least not until the present. Can you keep him at a safehouse somewhere?

PM: [Sighs, as if she knows how this will play out...which, she does.] I've got it all figured out. If everything goes according to plan, Nikhil Sharma and I will be alive and well.

[[SFX: Petra re-enters coordinates into the Timepiece, then takes out a gun and cocks it]]

PM: Here we go.

ER: Wait, Petra, why are you pointing a gun at the Timepiece?

[[SFX: Petra fires]]

ER: Oh my god—

PM: I said I've got this. See ya.

[[SFX: Timepiece activates. Radio tuning.]]

NS: [fights for breath] Sally?

SG: Whickman, please!

NS: Some...road trip, huh...?

SG: Nikhil...? Nikhil! Stay with me. Don't fall asleep...

NS: At least... you're home.

SG: Whickman, why are you just standing there? Move! Come on! Nikhil, Nikhil stay with me, don't fall asleep. Stay with me. Nikhil! Come on!

[[SFX: ODAR guards shuffle in.]]

CW: Get her out of here.

[[SFX: The guards converge on Sally and carry her away]]

SG: I said call a medic and you call guards on me?! Get off me! Go to hell, Whickman!

[[SFX: She is escorted out; the door closes. A bullet whizzes into Chet's eye.]]

CW: AUGH! My eye !!

[[SFX: Petra appears from the future]]

PM: Oh yeah, sorry about that.

CW: Who the FRICK are you?!

PM: The lady who took your eye out. Alright, I'll admit, I'm not that sorry.

CW: Why, you—

[[SFX: He grabs his gun again and prepares to fire.]]

PM: The weather in Tulsa today is wildfires.

CW: W...what...?

PM: Stand down, Director Whickman. That's an order. From...you. In the future. And if you point that thing at me again you're gonna lose more than your eye.

CW: GET A MEDIC IN HERE!

PM: Oh, now you call for one?

[[SFX: Medics arrive.]]

PM: Leave Chet alone, he'll be fine. This man here needs your help.

CW: Help me!!

PM: Chet!

CW: [Groaning.] Do...do what she says.

PM: Help me save this guy..

[[SFX: radio tuning; the ODAR Director's office]]

TONYA LEMARTINE (TLM): Come in.

[[SFX: Esther enters.]]

ER: Director LeMartine, looks like you've settled in nicely.

TLM: I have, thank you Dr. Roberts. Have a seat. I understand this must be a difficult transition. From what I understand, you and Former Director Whickman shared a great deal of trust.

ER: Um, not exactly. Well, sometimes.

TLM: Well, I hope in time, you can come to trust in my leadership as well.

ER: Rest assured, I trust in your leadership.

TLM: [Doubtful.] Dr. Roberts — can I call you Esther?

ER: Yes, that's fine.

TLM: Esther, I understand working here at ODAR makes you play your cards very close to your chest. But I genuinely do want us to work together, and that means earning your trust, not just asking it of you.

ER: *[dubious]* I appreciate that.

TLM: Which, of course, takes time. But until then, know that we'll protect you. That trial they put you through, things like that won't happen on my watch.

ER: Thank you. I'm sure you understand why that's...a little hard to believe given that the people who just tried me appointed my new supervisor.

TLM: Mmm. Trust that I know quite a few things about how ODAR works already.

ER: Of course, we've handed over most of our documentation to the Federal—

TLM: That's not what I mean. Yes, here, in this time, I was assigned the position of Director from the federal government just this week. But in reality, I have in fact occupied that position for quite a bit longer.

ER: ...oh. Since, um... Since when?

TLM: I first took the office back in 20[redacted].

ER: Wh-why would you come back here?

TLM: By your own orders, actually. There came a time when ODAR was rudderless and you desperately needed help that only a representative from the future could lend. But I decided to arrive before the situation really deteriorates. That is to say, now. After all, we can't have outsiders running things around here now, can we?

ER: O-of course not.

TLM: Then we're agreed. Under my leadership I can assure you that will never happen.

ER: I'm...glad to hear that.

TLM: Now. Might a certain Sally Grissom stick out as a notable employee of yours?

ER: Um...yes, I...have worked with her...from time to time.

TLM: Esther... please.

ER: ...Well if you already know then why'd you ask?

TLM: Trust. It's all about trust. Dr. Roberts, I think you and I will accomplish great things together. You've done spectacularly making ODAR into what it is. I look forward to showing you what it will be. I'd like to see her. Send her to me.

ER: ...Of course. Right away, Director LeMartine.

TLM: Please, call me Tonya.

[[SFX: radio tuning; Esther picking up Sally in a car]]

SG: Roberts, are you going to tell me what's going on?

ER: Sally, get in the goddamn car. And stop making noise.

[[SFX: Sally gets in and shurt the door]]

SG: I feel like I'm being smuggled out of here.

ER: Hey, you wanted that road trip right? Here we are; just us girls.

[[SFX: Esther speeds off]]

SG: Roberts, this is really heckin' weird.

ER: Oh, of course, I could never be the buddy you always wanted. Only Nikhil Sharma would do, right? Guess what, he can join us too.

SG: Roberts, you're not making any sense. Nikhil died.

ER: Except he didn't.

SG: I don't know what you're getting at, but I held him in my arms in his last moments.

ER: In his almost last moments. We sorta... revived him.

SG: WHAT. Don't even joke about this with me, Roberts.

ER: I know, it sounds unbelievable.

SG: So that's where we're going? You're taking me to him?

ER: I wasn't ever planning to, but now, well, I have to. It's the only safe place I know of.

SG: Why would you keep him from me all this time?! And why take me to him *now*?

ER: Well, the new director? I... I think it's the woman who sent him from future ODAR to kill you.

SG: Wait, that was her?! What does she–

ER: I need time to make her see reason and not have her kill the both of us onsight, and I'm gonna need your help smoothing all this over, so I'm spilling the bean can early, okay? Yes. Nikhil's alive, and he's working with us. And now you never again get to say I wasn't a good friend to you. Now can you just let me think for a moment.

[[SFX: radio tuning; Sally in the woods]]

SG: ...and I wonder what the RUSSIAN version of ODAR is called. Nikhil's from the future; he would know. Maybe I can ask him...'Cause I can do that now! He freaking cheated death! There's so much I want to ask him. It still doesn't feel real. We have Nikhil, here, in ODAR, on our team! Or, we will. Soon. Roberts told me to wait here while she disarms the path to the safehouse. Can you picture Roberts playing red-wire blue-wire? And man, on the road? She's a speed demon. I've never seen her move like she's on a mission before. It's kind of...awesome.

But...something I....hadn't really thought about in all this excitement: Nikhil is...still an Anchorite. He wanted to destroy ODAR, and I don't think sitting for years in a safehouse would change his mind much about that. Sitting there with Petra of all people definitely wouldn't change his mind about that. Especially if it only took Roberts and Chet Whickman eight hours in a CAGE to form that unholy alliance.

But now Nikhil and Petra... they're both here, in ODAR, again. Petra, who wanted nothing more than to get out of here... she wants to stay here too? She was willing to do all this for Roberts? Is Nikhil gonna be the same guy I knew?

I mean, we're still gonna be friends at least. I hope. He's not gonna do anything terrible to ODAR while I'm still in it.

Right?

[[SFX: Esther crunches her way out of the woods and hails Sally over]]

SG: Oh! Roberts is waving me over. It's time. [to Roberts] So he's here?

ER: [[Seemingly a considerable distance ahead, and moving further, calling back to her in as loud a whisper as she can manage.]] Keep your voice down! And yes, I just let him and Petra know you're coming. Wait! Don't step on that!

SG: Oh! Ok...

[[SFX: She edges around a tripwire. Sounds of the forest as they make their way to the safehouse.]]

SG: Kinda wish Roberts hadn't woken him up. Wish I could've surprised him. Then again I guess he's been here all this time — years — hiding from me. Is he even as excited as I am? Are we really gonna be the..."BFFs" he said we could be?

Nikhil...you're here! You're back! You're in the safehouse right there. You're just a few steps away now. But are you still the Nikhil I knew? Are we still gonna be...us? There's so much I want to ask you, that I thought I never would get to ask you. Don't you miss Mateo? Are you still gonna try to take me back to the future with you? You really fucked me up, man. And now I'm gonna see you in just a few seconds and...I don't know if I can bear it. My chest feels like it's going to cave in. This feels so weird. Why am I acting like this? [Sigh.]

Do you have any idea what you put me through? Do you have any idea how much it tortured me to think you were dead all this time? Hell, you were dead at that time. Couldn't you have said anything? You really sides with Roberts and Marquez's plan over sending me even the smallest sign that you were alright? I don't know what I'm gonna do when I see you! I wanna hug you and I wanna scream and I wanna... and I wanna punch you, too.

ER: Please try not to scream when I open this door.

[[SFX: Esther ascends the steps, then knocks "shave and a haircut"; Nikhil answers]]

NS: Sally freaking Grissom.

SG: ...You fucking asshole!

[[SFX: Sally drops her recorder in the dirt and runs up the stairs]]

ER: I said keep it down!

NS: I think you dropped your recorder–

[[SFX: Sally punches Nikhil in the face]]

NS: Ow! Sally, that hurts!

SG: You're fucking alive, I'm gonna hit you all I want!

[[SFX: Sally hits Nikhil a couple more times]]

PM: *[inside the cabin]* Alright kiddos can we please do this inside?

SG: Petra, you've got some explaining to do.

NS: In time, in time.

SG: In time. We've got that now.

NS: Now get in here, we've got fried chicken. Petra's been teaching me to cook.

SG: What's with everyone trying to calm me down with food? Oh my god that smells amazing.

[[SFX: The safehouse door closes; sounds of the forest; tape recorder ends]]

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ars PARADOXICA was created by Daniel Manning & Mischa Stanton. Season 3 was also written by Eli Barraza, Julian Mundy, Danielle Shemaiah & Tau Zaman.
Episode 29: Odyssey features -

Kristen DiMercurio (Sally Grissom)
Katie Speed (Esther Roberts)
Lia Peros (Petra)
Reyn Beeler (Chet Whickman)
Arjun Gupta (Nikhil Sharma)
Tina Huang (Tonya LeMartine)
with special thanks to Isabel Atkinson

Production help from Brandon Grugle. Original music by Mischa Stanton and by Eno Freedman-Brodmann.
ars PARADOXICA is brought to you by The Internet: And what happens next, you won't believe it!

04 26 03 15 18 05 01 16 01 05 26 24 09 05 21 04 16 08 19 03
WEATHER IN TULSA: WILDFIRES
SIGN: CANCER

30: Volunteer

WRITTEN BY DANIEL MANNING
DIRECTED & SOUND DESIGN BY MISCHA STANTON

[[SFX: tape start]]

SALLY GRISSOM (SG): Diary of Sally Grissom, June 24th, 1953. Good spirits today. Settling into more of a rhythm. Roberts is back home and working herself to death, as per usual, but the regular card games have resumed, and ever since she revealed unto me her grand plot of resurrection vis-a-vis Nikhil Sharma, it feels like she's on my team again, more now than it has in a lot of years. I mean, don't get me wrong, she's still working hard to promote the agenda of a less-than-upstanding top secret government agency, and it's very possible she only saved Nikhil to use him as a resource to make up for the fallen Blackroom, but at least she's being open and honest about it. To me. As… as far as I know.

Speaking of Nikhil, it is amazing to finally have him as part of my life again, getting to know him for real, being able to sit down and have a meal together. Like, ok for example, there's the way he holds a fork, I've never seen anyone else that does this. He holds it like a pencil. Like he's gonna spear a piece of broccoli and then smear it on a piece of paper in his chicken-scratch doctor's handwriting. It's just… I dunno. It's nice to have the time to notice the little things.

We're even bonding over trying to crack this hard drive we got from Partridge. Well, I say hard drive. It looks like a sort of cobbled-together mess made out of a hard drive on a chip, and some other parts. I think I can spot a miniature version of Partridge's Asynchronous Processing Unit? He must have been working on it for a while… Um. Anyway. Since Petra gave it to me I haven't had any luck decrypting it. Not that I was ever really a computer whiz. Hardware's all well and good but software always did me in, back when that was a thing. I asked Nikhil to take a look, but he's even worse than I am, give or take some ODAR field agent basic training. Ah well, I'll crack it sooner or later.

After I found out the whole plot, hearing that he'd been shacked up in secret for years just to keep me safe… I was worried he'd be different. And he is. From the few days I knew him, anyway. He's more… reserved. More guarded. Focused, almost, though on what I'm not entirely sure. And especially now that his former boss from the future is here running ODAR in the present day, which also kind of nullifies the reason Roberts revived him in the first place, since she knows the exact same intel about future Soviet plans as he does. Possibly even more so. So now that Nikhil's just kind of here anyway, and we still have to keep his life a secret… it seems like he's working on something else. And it's still a little awkward between the whole lot of us for me to ask. And my usual move is to barge in and ask anyway, but… it's a very fragile situation. Probably better to take it slow.

It’s just really nice to just have friends again. They’re all ODAR people, one way or another, but still. Makes life feel a little more normal. A little smoother, y’know? Though of course, it’d be even nicer if I could get them in the same room with each other. Give it time, Grissom.

And, in the interest of letting my life be smoother by escaping the day-to-days of ODAR R&D life! The classes are finally picking up traction. I wasn’t sure when I first sent the word around, but I figured a town like Point-of-Exile, with its unique abundance of electrical power and technological conveniences, would probably attract the curiosity of more than a few ladies. I’ve got about 15 of them now, who come on Friday nights to learn electrical engineering at the rec center. This week we’re doing doing real circuits! I love the hands-on stuff. I’m also working on a name for us. “Grissom’s Gizmo Gals.” What do you think? ...yeah, I dunno. I’m still workshopping it.

[[SFX: radio tuning; Sally's Gizmo Gals exiting the classroom]]

SG: Of course! Tell Myrtle I’ll drop over a recording of this week’s lecture with a tub of soup, alright? Tell her to feel better.

JEANETTE EVERWORTH (JE): Hi, Sally, could I bend your ear a moment?

SG: Hey Jeanette, what’s on your mind?

JE: Actually… there are a lot of people, and…

SG: Sure, no problem. Let me…

[[SFX: Sally shuts off the recorder; radio tuning; the diner]]

JE: Thank you so much for meeting me.

SG: Of course! Anything for one of my girls. What can I do you for?

JE: I’ll cut right to it, I suppose. You work for the government, right?

SG: Um… yeah, I do.

JE: I’ve just seen you drive up the hill to the department of whoever you’re supposed to be.

SG: That’s fine, I’m just not allowed to talk about what I do–

WAITSTAFF (WS): Hi, welcome to Lou’s Cafe, can I get you something?

SG: *[dismissively]* Hi, couple coffees. Thanks.

WS: Oh, my...

[[SFX: Waitstaff leaves]]

JE: No, I just wanted to know about my niece. Carrie Everworth, do you know her?

SG: Can't say I do.

JE: Oh, well, I'm from Greeley, you see, and that's where my brother lives, he raised his kids out there, and his oldest, Carrie, she got recruited–she's real smart, you know–she got recruited by the government, and she's not allowed to say where but she moved out here, so I figured that it's probably…

SG: Yeah, that's probably us. That, or… Let's just assume it's us.

[[SFX: Waitstaff reappears]]

WS: Here you go, girls.

[[SFX: Waitstaff sets down two mugs and pours coffee; Sally and Jeanette wait tensely for her to finish]]

WS: ...Well, if you need anything, just holler.

SG: Thanks.

[[SFX: Waitstaff leaves]]

JE: She's been living with me the past couple weeks, and I've really appreciated the help around the house after Lyle passed on, but about a week ago she just up and moved out with scarcely more than a word!

SG: Oh. How unlike her?

JE: She told me she was being assigned something important, but I didn't think you all were the kind that likes to travel abroad.

SG: It depends, but you know I can't say much. National security, et cetera.

JE: Could you maybe, just… I don't know… can you check on her? Make sure she's alright?

SG: Yeah, I could take a look, send out some feelers.

JE: Could you? Carrie is the only family I see outside of Thanksgiving and Christmas. I'd really appreciate it.

[[SFX: radio tuning; Tonya's office]]

TONYA LEMARTINE (TLM): Well. then what can you do?

ESTHER ROBERTS (ER): We just don't have the perspective we had anymore. We need to organize the timeline better.

TLM: I believe I've made myself perfectly clear.

ER: You have, and I really appreciate your patience during the changing of the guard. But I'm still trying to catch up on everything I missed, and there's a lot to get a handle on–

TLM: You're right: I have been patient. Obviously, your situation is unique, and because you're such a valuable asset I'm willing to give you a little wiggle room. But unfortunately the world does not stop spinning just because you can't catch a break.

ER: Director–

TLM: Tonya, please. I really do insist.

ER: Tonya. We still don't know the precise scope of Hank Cornish's operation. The security audit alone locked my staff out of their offices for five whole days.

TLM: I hope you're not suggesting that the measures we took to ensure that our organization was free of further Soviet influence were redundant?

ER: Obviously I don't think that. But the resources I have access to today have shrunk dramatically since a year ago, and the task has only ballooned. I'm creating a coherent threat response to the Soviets with one hand tied behind my back and blindfolded.

TLM: If you aren't up to the task, I could just–

ER: No! I'm just coming to you as someone who I will have supposedly asked to handle this specific situation: how are we supposed to keep any sort of useful frame of reference when tectonic shifts in history are happening under our feet every day?

TLM: You can't do this work without the Blackroom, it seems.

ER: Our infrastructure was built entirely off the presumption that we'd have the Blackroom to fall back on. If we're ever going to get a leg up, we need some kind of alternative. We're an intelligence agency, and we're sorely lacking in intelligence.

TLM: Hmm.

[[SFX: Tonya pulls out a desk drawer. She sets a pile of folders on the desk.]]

ER: What's that? The file marked "Blackroom Replacements, Ideas A-M?"

TLM: It's actually labeled Nonlinear Chronology Management Proposals, and it only covers A-J. Let's have a look, shall we?

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

SG: Diary of Sally Grissom, July 2nd, 1953. Guess what came in today? That's right, it's Carrie Everworth's file! You know the lengths I had to go through to get it? I know Roberts is probably not gonna file another inessential document request–she learned that lesson pretty hard recently–so I went to Bridget Chambers, someone else who probably owes me a favor, and she told me… that it wasn't her department. Is she not in Human Resources on the side or something? I don't know why I thought that. So I asked Petra if she could, like, steal it or whatever but turns out she already had the file there for me and requested I leave her alone to practice her jiu jitsu or whatever. It's real spooky how she does that. Handy, but spooky. Anyway so I didn't actually end up having to go through a lot of hoops but I'm sure Petra had to do some cool action spy stuff to get it, so, like, many Bothans or whatever. The point is, I have the file.

[[SFX: Sally opens up the file and leafs through]]

Let's see here… Oh, there's a note from Petra. "No Bothans were harmed in the unlawful removal of this document." Heh. Nice. "Return this to the mail slot for "SYLVIA PUREBOOT" by 3pm tomorrow." Who the hell is Sylvia Pureboot? "P.S. YOUR DIARIES SMELL LIKE FARTS LOVE NIKHIL" Hah! What a nerd. Anyway, let's have the rest of it. Okay, Carrie Everworth, born 1924 in Greeley, CO. Blah-dee-dah, science and language award… recruited by ODAR… assigned to a… what's this? There's a… oh that is a LOAD! The gall of these people! I am SO PI–

[[SFX: radio tuning; Tonya's office]]

SG: Director LeMartine?

TLM: Dr. Grissom, so nice to have you back in my office again.

SG: Ha haa I know, right? Yeah, I'm real sorry I had to keep rescheduling. I've just been slammed, you know? Burning the midnight oil? Just got a lot of… stuff, you know, everything with the Russians and stuff?

TLM: Of course. You're busy, I understand that. I will admit though, I've been disappointed. It's nice to be able talk to the only other person in town from 20[redacted].

SG: Yeah, right? Isn't this wild? It's like Back to the goddamn Future out here.

TLM: Sorry, I don't really watch movies. That's the flying car one with Eric Stoltz?

SG: Yeah it's, uh, it takes place in the 1950s.

TLM: I'm sure those filmmakers used period-accurate costumes and sets. Being here must remind you of that movie.

SG: Yeah, it… it does. So you're really from 20[redacted]?

TLM: I am. Born 19[redacted]. Started at ODAR 20[redacted], became acting director by 20[redacted], and then relocated to 1953. Obviously, I come from a history where ODAR operates well after WWII, so we don't share identical histories, but I'd wager nobody holds a history quite as unique as yours.

SG: Well, we've all got the same history before 1943, you know?

TLM: So, you actually scheduled this meeting in advance, which I have on good authority is a rarity for you, so I assume you have something to ask me.

SG: I've, um, just got a few questions about our communication protocols in the future. What comes next after the Blackroom.

TLM: Of course. As I'm sure you know, without Anthony Partridge's sacrifice, we can't communicate with our past and future as easily, so we're looking at implementing some alternatives.

SG: What kind of alternatives?

TLM: One of the bonuses of being from the future–as I'm sure you've noticed–is that we've actually had a great deal more time to experiment with the Timepiece than you have with your limited 1950s vantage.

SG: Rub it in, why don't you.

TLM: One of the fruits of our labor is a project called Outpost. We're essentially repurposing the initial Blackroom concept of a communications hub suspended in a null-time field for field operatives to synchronize with.

SG: If you don't mind my asking, how is that going to be... you know, staffed?

TLM: Looking for a career change, Dr. Grissom? I didn't think you were the type.

SG: No, it's not that. You know, I was just wondering what the deal was. I know with Partridge he was in a rough spot, and I wanted to know if you've got a person, or what…

TLM: Oh. You're talking about Carrie Everworth.

SG: Yeah. Jeanette chased me down after class last Friday.

TLM: I should have been more worried about her aunt in your class. Virtue #4 of the ODAR Field Manifesto: a critical eye toward coincidence.

SG: So you're just gonna send her to the same black you sent Partridge to, huh?

TLM: [sighs]

SG: He languished there for god knows how long and died alone and I'm not gonna let you do that again to someone else! She's just a kid, LeMartine.

TLM: The Outposts are not the same as Anthony Partridge's prison, and I really wish you'd withhold judgment and hold your tongue until you actually know anything about it.

SG: Oh? Do I not know what the fuck I'm talking about? Because I brought examples. Exhibit A: "The Outpost project replicates the functionality of the Anchor Point Chronology Observation Relay Outpost aka Blackroom on a larger scale with a similar personnel cost."

TLM: I understand your concern, Sally, but let me be clear with you here: we need manpower in 1943. We need people on the ground. It's where we're most vulnerable. It's the front line of defense against a world that you wouldn't recognize as your own.

SG: So you're just gonna, eh, more or less kill a few people of your own, just because "It's for the war, Jerry!"

TLM: Yes! People die in war, Sally. Are you saying that by sending soldiers into battle, knowing they might not come home, that I am committing murder by sending them there? Ha! My word! You've figured it out! You've discovered the grand contradiction! We have to tell the New York Times about this! We'll have world peace in a month.

SG: That doesn't make it right.

TLM: I respect that your life was stolen from you, and it's a wound that may truly never heal, but you cannot deprive another from making the same choice.

SG: You can't in good faith ask someone to choose to live out the rest of their life alone in a small dark room.

TLM: Once again, I really wish you'd wait to comment on matters of which you remain woefully ignorant. The Outpost isn't operated by somebody in a CAGE.

SG: Well… so then what is it?

TLM: While there is a null-time component to the Outpost, it's operated remotely by an agent stationed nearby in late 1943 and 1944.

SG: That's not possible. That shouldn't be possible. There's the quantum uncertainty… thing.

TLM: Well, since I'm sure you know about "the quantum uncertainty… thing" you also know that in the coming decades you yourself will discover that CAGEs emit a very faint amount of radiation back into the outside world, and,

of course, that that radiation can be manipulated to transmit meaningful data. So please, tell me more about what shouldn't be possible.

SG: No, hold on, I've never measured that before–

TLM: Harder to see it in the early days. Too much background interference. But now that I've brought back documents outlining the basic principles, I'm confident we can get it up and running.

SG: ...If you can operate it on the outside, you don't need someone to do it in 1943. You don't need to ask someone to give up their life for this.

TLM: You seem very sure of that.

SG: I'll prove it to you. Give me a week, and I'll design something that will do everything you can get out of this thing without sending anybody back. Listen, you'll be able to run this thing from your desk. Well, maybe not literally your desk but–

TLM: I understand hyperbole, thanks. You've got seven days, Sally. Hop to it.

[[SFX: radio tuning; the diner, Sally sucks on a milkshake.]]

SG: "And I have a straw, and it reaches acroooooooooooss the room…"

ER: Hm?

SG: Nothing. It's nothing. So I get that whatever, she's got a fancy quantum indicator that can blah blah blah monitor CAGE radiation blah condense an uncertainty state blah blah blah parse the signal to avoid a race hazard, blah blah blah, but where is she getting all this stuff?

ER: Well, she's from 20[redacted], she's got this whole… barrelful of answers. Technology, operational procedures, systems analysis. Not everything we could ask for, but certainly a lot more than we had.

SG: Sounds suspicious.

ER: A woman arriving from the future with advanced technology? That's suspicious?

SG: You know what I mean. She's from ODAR. They're all the same.

ER: So everyone from ODAR is equally untrustworthy?

SG: No! Obviously. There's you, Gaines, Chambers, Petra's not but she's more or less a good person I think…

ER: And you?

SG: Very funny.

ER: Sally, I… I'm not making light of treason here, believe me, but you kind of did join an insurrection against this organization that almost certainly would have led to death and destruction on a widespread scale.

SG: Science is still out on that one–

ER: Sally…

SG: But I know what you mean. ODAR and I have a troubled relationship. Maybe I'm just unnerved that somebody from 20[redacted] has answers that I don't. But do you think I should trust her, though?

ER: I wouldn't trust anybody. But take my advice with a grain of salt I guess, I was recently framed by rogue Soviet agents operating under my nose, and the only thing that spared me the noose was that it would be too expensive to train my replacement.

SG: Hey, I could do your job no sweat! Just gotta… not funny? Ok.

ER: Was she really that amenable to you? She just listened to your concerns and… agreed with you?

SG: Terrifying, right?

ER: Downright arcane. I mean, if she really didn't want to hear your side or whatever, she didn't have to.

SG: I just… maybe I can save her.

ER: Who, that girl? Your student's daughter?

SG: Niece. She works for us, but if they send her to Philadelphia 1943 they'll never see each other again.

ER: Sounds like you've got a lot on your plate, then.

SG: Is it possible that LeMartine actually gives a flying fuck what I think?

ER: Well there's one way to find out.

[[SFX: radio tuning; Sally giving a presentation]]

SG: So with the adaptations to the Uncertainty Condenser mechanism that I outlined on page six, alongside the revised antenna placement here...

[[SFX: slides clicking over]]

SG: ...here, and here inside the station can increase the effective range from 18 months from the origin point to five or six years.

TLM: Hmph.

SG: As per my initial proposal in the abstract, with the range improvements and the human involvement of AVENUE in ‘46 with OBSERVER and ECONOMIC in ‘48, it’s possible to crew the Outpost with only folks contemporary to us and agents we already have in the field.

TLM: You’ve done your research.

SG: So much. So, so, much. I’ve gotten really good at this. If you’ll turn to the tables in the back, in the appendix, you’ll see that you can redirect approximately fifteen thousand dollars quarter over quarter over the lifespan of the project.

TLM: How did you… get such accurate budget predictions for this?

SG: I picked up a bit when I did the budget for FY1947 because there was literally nobody else there who could do it, and then I did a lot of guessing and a lot of math, like, Partridge math… and I asked Roberts.

TLM: Fair enough.

SG: So, what do you think? Are we gonna save Carrie, or what?

TLM: I think what you’ve showed me today is the best justification for rethinking my plans for the Outpost.

SG: Wait, really?

TLM: I’m not wasting any time getting the Outpost set up, but I’m definitely going to take this data into account. It’s more efficient, and on the upside we can keep a few more agents’s families intact. Not bad, Dr. Grissom.

SG: Holy shit. This is the most human thing ODAR has ever done.

[[SFX: radio tuning; Sally's house, rain outside. Someone knocks at the door.]]

SG: Hm?

[[SFX: door opens]]

SG: Jeanette! How… how are you?

JE: *[crying]* I got… I got a letter from Carrie.

SG: That’s great news! Is she moving back in with you?

JE: No…

SG: Oh my god, I’m so sorry, come in.

[[SFX: door closes]]

SG: Hey, hey, sit down.

JE: I know you said you pulled some strings but, she said they're transferring her halfway around the world.

SG: I did! I thought I…

JE: Do you wanna hear the letter?

SG: Uhm, sure. If you don't mind.

JE: It's postmarked Philadelphia.

SG: Philadelphia...

JE: "Dear Aunt Jeannie,

"I am sorry I haven't written or called in some time. I've been very busy with my new job (as I am sure you remember) and I wanted to send you one last letter before I set off on a grand adventure.

"As usual I cannot say much, but I have been given a special role as a communications liaison. I am working with the Navy to ensure that their people and my people stay in contact with each other! This is an incredible opportunity, and I am blessed to have it.

"Currently, I am training in Philadelphia, but once we set out from the harbor, I won't be able to send you any more letters. I can't tell you where I'm going, but I promise that I'm going to go to amazing places to make you and dad and America proud. I always remember how you used to talk about how Grandmother was a Hello Girl during the Great War, and I think some of that might have rubbed off on me. So, in a way, I have you to thank for this!" [sobs]

SG: Jeanette…

JE: "There is no need to worry, I will be fine. They are giving me the best training and I have already learned so much! I wish I could tell you some of the unbelievable things that I've seen! You would lose your hat. But I cannot, not even for one million sundaes (ha ha)." It was a joke that we had.

SG: Okay.

JE: "Also, I am sorry for moving out so soon. I was having a lot of fun with you and it was nice to see you again, it was like the old times when you and Uncle Lyle were staying with us, when he was sick. But those feelings are both good and bad. It was a stressful year for all of us. Edward had just gotten back from the Pacific, and I know that he wasn't well past the arm, but he inflicted that anger and cruelty on the rest of us and to experience that kind of violence from one's own brother quickly hollowed the comfort from my childhood home. When I got this job and moved in with you, I

thought it would be a fresh start, but it was not meant to happen. I could not shake the painful memories of home. Aunt Jeannie, I am sorry that I was a coward and did not tell you the honest truth. I pray you will forgive me.

I love you,

Carrie"

[Jeanette sobs]

SG: Oh, Jeanette, I'm so sorry… I'm so sorry…

JE: No, she's... she's not a coward. I understand her. I love my family, but…

SG: Yeah, I… I also love my family, but… I'm sorry this didn't go the way you wanted.

JE: After everything… maybe moving far far away from here is what she needed to do. I… I can respect that.

SG: Do you want… do you want another hug?

JE: Yes, I think so.

[[SFX: Sally embraces Jeanette]

SG: And then I'm getting to the bottom of this.

[[SFX: radio tuning; Sally barges into Tonya's office]]

SG: Come on, LeMartine, what the hell?!

TLM: Now that's more like what I'd expected from the great Dr. Sally Grissom.

SG: Yeah well, when I try it the nice way I don't actually get listened to! You're still deploying Carrie Everworth! I thought we had a deal.

TLM: Actually, what I said was we'd only need fewer volunteers.

SG: We had a deal!

TLM: Sally, do you want me to play the tape back for you? Because you know I can.

SG: Then what fucking gives, lady?

TLM: It was Agent Everworth's decision. I called her in and explained to her that we could scale back the program. And do you know what she did? She insisted on being one of the select few. And I'm sorry Sally, but even with

your improvements to the system we still need volunteers. That's how this works. We're not the boogeyman, we don't snatch people from their cradles.

SG: Not anymore.

TLM: They volunteer, Dr. Grissom. No one is here against their will. They signed up for this job, and they want to do it well. This place runs on good men and women who put themselves before their country. That's just how it works.

SG: You're the head of ODAR and you need resources. You fill their heads with propaganda from the jump, of course they volunteer!

TLM: Yes, they're working for an agency with an agenda. And none of us, not one, is perfect. You want to talk about how fallible I am? I can acknowledge my failures. I've made mistakes, I've made poor decisions in haste. Hell, I once put out a kill order on you for 1949.

SG: That… that was you?

TLM: Yes. That was me. I saw a quick and dirty way to solve multiple problems at once, problems that had a serious impact on national security. Larger than I'm willing to admit to you presently, I think. But it was foolish and hasty, and I regret it. For whatever it's worth to you now all these years later, I'm sorry. But I said it to you before and I'll say it again: just because you've lacked a bit of agency with regard to the people who sat in this desk before I did, doesn't mean Carrie Everworth isn't exactly where she wants to be. It's not about you, and it's not about me. It's about all of us. Together. Okay?

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

SG: Diary of Sally Grissom, July 13th, 1953. Just got back from Tonya LeMartine's office. Still not sure what to make of her. She… she admitted to my face that she put out the kill order on me. The one that sent Nikhil Sharma back to me. She just… dropped it. In the middle of a debate. And she still landed her point. For all that Bill Donovan and Hank Cornish had agendas that pushed ODAR into dark territory, there are a lot of dedicated people in ODAR just trying to do the right thing. And it sounds like Carrie Everworth wanted to get away from home. In that sense, you could almost call her deployment… kind.

What the hell kind of woman is that? One who tells you everything up front, and still has the balls to run ODAR the way it's always been run, from here to 20[redacted]? I don't know if an ODAR that operates with bold-faced honesty is better than before… or worse.

Still. I think… I don't think I can trust her completely. I'm not gonna invite her to Christmas or anything, but… there's info that she doesn't have, and I think she wouldn't be the absolute worst person to have it. So I think I'm gonna tell her about Partridge's archive. And maybe if I'm doing it above-

board, I can use ODAR resources and actually make some headway with it. Man, this little thing is a tough nut to crack.

[[SFX: displaced air, a creaking floorboard]]

SG: What the-

[[SFX: Someone throws a bag over Sally's head and binds her; she struggles]]

SOVIET AGENT (SA): [RU] Give her the serum!

[[SFX: Another agent sticks her with a needle and injects her with a serum; she continues to struggle, weakening, before losing conscoiusness. One of the agents picks her up and slings her over his shoulder; they make to exit, but:]]

SA: [RU] Turn off the recording device. Let's go.

[[SFX: one of the agents approaches the recorder to turn it off; tape stop]]

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ars PARADOXICA was created by Daniel Manning & Mischa Stanton. Season 3 was also written by Eli Barraza, Julian Mundy, Danielle Shemaiah & Tau Zaman.
Episode 30: Volunteer features -

Kristen DiMercurio (Sally Grissom)
Katie Speed (Esther Roberts)
Tina Huang (Tonya LeMartine)
K McIntyre (Jeanette Everworth)
Laura Faye Smith, Pasha Sol (additional voices)
with special thanks to Isabel Atkinson

Original music by Mischa Stanton and by Eno Freedman-Brodmann.
ars PARADOXICA is brought to you by The Internet: Machines talking to machines talking to machines talking to you.

26 21 13 24 17 10 09 21 16 09 01 05 02 09 26 17 14 08 24 05 06 12 01 24 03
WEATHER IN TULSA: earthquakes

31: Control

WRITTEN BY JULIAN MUNDY
DIRECTED & SOUND DESIGN BY MISCHA STANTON

[Ad music]

MISCHA (M): This episode is brought to you in part by ForHims.com. And today I'm bringing in a little help. Hey Dan.

DAN (D): Hey Mischa.

M: So, talk to me about men's health.

D: I mean, right now on our podcast? Jeez, Meesh, talking about health is weird, and awkward, and we have to talk about hair loss telemedicine shampoo and I don't like talking about my health because it's weird.

M: Yeah but we have to and you agreed to be on this one and now you've got cold feet. Give me the facts.

D: Two-thirds of cismen experience hair loss.

M: Cismen! You-a-one-a-those, right?

D: Sure, I guess.

M: You experiencing hair loss?

D: Not really, but you know, I do sort of struggle with–

M: Hims! You gotta go with hims! Their hair kit's got scientifically-proven doctor stuff that'll help you keep the hair you've got!

D: I don't really appreciate you blackmailing my hair but uh, there's studies and stuff. Oh my god there's science here. Holy shit. Wow, this is really nice.

M: Yeah?

D: Well, health stuff always makes me anxious, because I don't really feel like I understand it a lot and I'm afraid to ask because I don't want to look stupid. And then I wait and it gets worse. But here they tell you, like, why they are prescribing these things to you and what the medicine is and what it does to you. This is empowering. I'm feeling empowered.

M: As a cisman? With hims's help?

D: Sure.

M: We got it! We got the endorsement!

D: [*pitching voice*] You sure did. Thanks to science, baldness can be optional. Hims connects you with real doctors and medical-grade solutions to treat hair loss.

M: Medical-grade, over the internet? How's it possible?

D: Expanded telemedicine laws in the US! You might even call them relaxed!

M: That sounds convenient!

D: You just have to answer a few quick questions and a real doctor will review and prescribe you.

M: But surely, they'll ship the package to a random spot within a ten mile radius of your home?

D: Nope! To your door!

M: Wow! Our listeners get a trial month of hims for just $5 today right now while supplies last. See website for full details. This would cost hundreds if you went to the doctor or a pharmacy!

D: Go to https://forhims.com/ars. That's https://forhims.com/ars. (https://forhims.com/ars)

M: Gotta say it three times.

[Previously, on ars Paradoxica]

HC: Mister Gaines, I understand you and Mister Marian served in the same unit.

LG: That's right. Three-Eighty-Eighth Mobile Infantry.

RV: My name is Raymond Vico. I will be in charge of shaping you into worthwhile ODAR agents, trimming the fat from you, body and soul.

RV: As of this moment, the six of you are members of our little circle.

DM: I don't have much time. I just want to say that… Lou, if I knew you at all, you're going to come find me one day. At least, I thought you would. Turns out I have to leave before you ever get the chance.

AV: Clock is ticking, my friend!

DM: Why am I running off with a Soviet agent? Because someone, anyone, has got to serve as a check to what ODAR can do. No one nation should have all that power. Learned that from… you, I guess.

SG: So you're really from 20[redacted]?

TLM: I am. Born in 19[redacted], Started at ODAR 20[redacted], became acting director by 20[redacted], and then relocated to 1953.

SG: I think I'm gonna tell her about Partridge's archive. And maybe if I'm doing it above-board, I can use ODAR resources and actually make some headway with it. Man, this little thing is a tough nut to crack.

[[SFX: displaced air, a creaking floorboard]]

SG: What the–

[[SFX: Someone throws a bag over Sally's head and binds her; she struggles]]

SA: [*RU*] Give her the serum!

[Theme song]

[[SFX: tape starting]]

[Int. ODAR Director's Office]

TONYA LEMARTINE (TLM): Thank you all for coming.

[[SFX: door closes]]

LOU GAINES (LG): Yes, ma'am?

BRIDGET CHAMBERS (BC): Ma'am, has something happened?

PETRA MARQUEZ (PM): None of us have been able to get in touch with Sally.

ESTHER ROBERTS (ER): Do we know anything yet?

TLM: Please hold on to your questions, I will answer them in a moment. I must ask for your particular discretion, as in, no broadcast of any kind. The staff at large, should they ask, should be told that Doctor Grissom is currently taking a much-needed leave of absence. The truth is this: we have reason to believe that Doctor Sally Grissom is now in the custody of a foreign power.

LG: Wait a minute, how can something like this happen?

TLM: Although it is still too early to say for sure, the signs so far point to an operation by the agency that employs the services of Amelin Vasilievich. I share your dismay at this attack, but please know this: I can assure you that as of this moment, it is almost certain that wherever she is, she is alive and, most likely, well cared-for. Doctor Grissom is an asset of enormous value to whoever holds her, in this context. She will be safe, or some approximation of it.

PM: And what are we doing about this–

TLM: Please, Petra, I will answer what I can. We are still determining the exact circumstances of Doctor Grissom's capture by these agents, and their means of access. They moved fast, planned it well, and found the blind spot they needed. Pay attention to the distinction: needed, not wanted. It was well-planned, but they had to put us on the defensive.

LG: Or bait a larger hook. You know that's a possibility.

TLM: Petra, I am tasking you to lead the extraction team once we locate Doctor Grissom. Agent Gaines, I want you on that team as well.

LG: If you hadn't said it, I would have volunteered.

TLM: I don't doubt it. Okay, I believe that answers what you were going to ask, Petra.

PM: It does. But we still have to find her.

TLM: You'll all be part of the process. But the faster we crack something in what Hank Cornish left behind, the faster we find Doctor Grissom.

BC: Understood. I won't waste any time.

TLM: Very good. Ms. Roberts, please continue in your normal duties, but I will keep you briefed with new developments. I hope you'll make yourself available as the need arises.

ER: Of course, Director. But let me just say, I think if anyone can track Sally back to where she's being held, it would be the people in this room. They might be the most resourceful people I know.

PM: We've only had to be "resourceful" because nobody ever did us any favors.

BC: Petra!

TLM: Only this time, you have the full support of this office. Work smart, work fast. Save this one life, and we might save a lot more down the line. Thank you all for your time. Get to it.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

[Int. KTNK HQ]

[[SFX: A door unlocks, opens, and Adler enters.]]

SG: Who the hell are you?

ADLER (AD): Doctor Grissom, I have some questions.

SG: You clowns always do. This kind of brings me back to old times, actually. Who are you?

AD: I am your handler.

SG: Do I look like a dog?

AD: I am quite familiar with your dossier already. You are, for the record, Sally Virginia Grissom, currently a resident of Point-of-Exile, Colorado?-

SG: Who are you?

AD: I am here to judge how best we proceed, Doctor Grissom. You are in a difficult situation. You travel such a long way from [20XX], only to wake up, face-down on a battleship with guns pointed at you. I mention this only because you will notice there are no armed guards present. You must be kept safe, and unharmed.

SG: You're Russian, right? Or maybe not, there are a lot of other countries on the Red Team these days. So you kidnapped me for, what, a bargaining chip?

AD: You invented the Timepiece. You are very significant. I understand that altering the flow of time and space was not the intended function of the design, in the beginning. In your original frame of reference.

SG: Jesus, listen to you. So you had a direct line to Cornish, huh? Did he read my diary, too?

AD: I understand you prefer audio recordings to written journal-keeping. I confess, I would be curious to hear how a time traveler occupies her mind in moments of solitude. When was the last time you made contact with your coordinator? The Blackroom?

SG: No. You don't get to do this. You might not have guns pointed at me, but I know you have them ready just a snap of your fingers away. You want to threaten me with torture? Death? Eat me. I've been there, done that.

AD: I can see your frustration, and your anxiety. This should have gone more smoothly. We wanted to approach you as we did Mr. Cornish. Your presence here was something we had little time to plan to satisfaction. You are quite safe here.

SG: More creepy shit dressed up like a favor. So you people grabbed me because your agency wants to tip the scales? You want me to win this thing for you?

AD: ODAR tipped the scales, with your assistance. We are merely trying to keep up. We have had help, along the way, yes. David Marian, Henry Cornish, what they did was very brave, but at best, they were but single steps towards stalemate. You could balance things, or help us end this.

SG: Have you ever thought about surrendering?

AD: Ah, but naturally, who could accept such a thing? We will speak again soon, Doctor Grissom. We are quite confident in your cooperation.

[[SFX: the door opens, Adler stands and leaves]]

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

[Ext. Petra's Cabin (Night)]

PM: Be right back.

[[SFX: Petra goes inside as Tonya exits the car and approaches the porch.]]

LG: Evening, director.

TLM: Good evening. Thank you both for meeting me.

LG: We're eager to get down to business.

[[SFX: Petra returns, shuts the door behind her.]]

PM: Coffee?

TLM: Very kind of you.

PM: Ready whenever you are.

TLM: You wouldn't rather continue this inside?

PM: I prefer the fresh air, if that's okay with you.

[[SFX: Tonya hesitates, then takes a seat.]]

TLM: Then let's begin. This is an unprecedented position we find ourselves in, so I am making Agent Vico's team available to you. Petra, you may know them as the Seventy-Sevens.

PM: You're kidding.

TLM: Not at all. Agent Vico will consult with you on the best potential fit for the two agents joining your team. Many are fluent in Russian.

PM: I thought this was a rescue, ma'am. I was hoping to avoid… I'll just say it: wetwork.

TLM: They are versatile, Petra, among our strongest assets. I want them on-mission in case things go bad and we end up needing to use some plausible deniability. None of the Seventy-Sevens technically exist in this time period. As secret weapons go, you couldn't ask for better.

LG: I'm a little lost, director. I was under the impression that Agent Vico was an instructor. He has a time-hopping kill team? I thought we were a little more elegant than that.

TLM: They are a well-kept secret, Agent Gaines, so I am trusting you with information that amounts to a bomb; one that triggers when you talk about it. With my apologies. But in short, the Seventy-Sevens are a group within ODAR comprised primarily of US military operatives from the year 1977, each highly trained and equipped with two decades worth of historical hindsight. They are trusted with the most dangerous missions because they are some of the best we have, and have given up their own futures to help fix our present.

PM: We used to hear about them like stories about the Boogeyman. Someone I knew swore he saw a Seventy-Seven talking to our teacher once.

TLM: They are just ODAR agents. But like you, they know what war is, and most of all, they want to remove the need for any more of them. Agent Vico trained you for some time, correct?

LG: Yes, ma'am, he did, just after Director Whickman signed off on my acting field status. We never spoke much beyond what was necessary in the intensive course, but he sometimes used slang I didn't recognize. I learned early in my soldiering career not to make the drill sergeant take a special interest, so I left it alone.

PM: Smart move.

TLM: Agent Vico was one of the older candidates, and already had some experience as an ODAR instructor when the Seventy-Sevens program began. He will be consulting on this operation as well, so you will meet soon enough.

LG: Anything more we should know about the operation for when things start moving?

TLM: Miss Roberts will be coming with a secondary team, regardless of where the game plays out. As with yours, selection is still in progress, but you will be briefed as needed.

PM: You want to put another high-value ODAR member in play?

TLM: I need someone with specialized clearance present, should something happen we didn't plan for. We're down a Blackroom, if you haven't heard. This is me planning for everything I can think of.

PM: So of course, you wanna send in Esther Roberts, your only competition to running this place. Rather than going yourself.

TLM: Whatever else you may think of me, I do not take risks without first running the numbers. Chet Whickman may have accepted second guesses, but I do not. Whickman was appointed director because he was in the right place,

at the right time, answering to the right people. Luck of the draw. I was hand-selected to run this agency, and you'll soon see why.

[[SFX: Tonya takes a swig of coffee]]

TLM: If there is nothing further, please enjoy your evening. Thank you for the coffee.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

[Int. KTNK Headquarters]

AD: Did you have an interest in history, before you came to live in this time period?

SG: You want me to be your sherpa through the next few decades, is that it? That does sound a lot simpler than building another friggin' time machine. I wish you'd been in the room when the question came up.

AD: The entrance you made seems to have left an impression. I remind you, Doctor Grissom, you are significant. But it is possible that, as soon as you landed on the deck of that aircraft carrier those many years ago, everything you knew since that moment could be unfamiliar to you. The traveler's testimony is something personal, like a bedtime story told to them by a parent. Even if we were inclined to believe such a tale, doing so would require enormous trust on our part. Who is to say where you might lead us, in the end?

SG: So what then?

AD: The Soviet Union was not the one to invent the atomic bomb, Doctor Grissom, it was simply the one to answer America's claim to dominance. You have heard the expression, "power must be a check to power?" Paraphrased from Montesquieu, who was so beloved by the writers of the American constitution. The world war didn't end after 1945, it merely changed venue. We continued to fight. If we had not, the United States would simply have taken what it wanted because no other nation could have stood against a bully with a nuclear weapon.

SG: [*tired, miserable*] What do you want?

AD: To end the fighting, as quick as possible. To return to a world not constantly threatening to destroy itself. But that may take a great sacrifice, and I know the difficulty Americans face in accepting that to win, sacrifice is not only inevitable, but necessary to enact true change. I know you do not have the same difficulty.

SG: [*flat, angry*] You people will decide who deserves to die. You always do. Just get out.

AD: People are going to die anyway. That is what happens when a war is fought without a winning strategy. The only thing one can praise about a war is how soon it ends. We will speak again soon, Doctor Grissom. Please think about what I have said.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

[Ext. SG's House]

[[SFX: Archie growls]]

PM: Guess we'll try this again tomorrow, you little freak!

[[SFX: Petra shuts the door.]]

BC: Good morning! I tried you at the cabin, so I figured you'd be here instead. Archie being difficult today?

PM: Yeah, a little. He doesn't have to look so smug about it, is all. What brings you to the surface world? You look… happy.

BC: Well, we don't have anything that looks like someplace they'd hide Sally. Not yet. But I think the late Mr. Cornish might have had somebody who could point us there.

PM: Everyone else already briefed?

BC: So far the only people who know are Director LeMartine, Lou, my little team of researchers, and now you.

PM: Okay. Well, let's keep it that way until I can get to him. Got an address?

BC: Sweetheart, I left a whole care package on your porch.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

[Int. Andrew Thurston's Apartment]

PM: So what's left over from the flight? Omigosh, dried peaches? I didn't even see these in there.

[[SFX: Petra unwraps something]]

ANDY THURSTON (AT): [*confused, muffled sound*]

[[SFX: Petra pulls out a chair.]]

PM: So, Andrew James Thurston, Eleven-Twenty-Six Connecticut Avenue, Washington DC. United States Customs Service officer in good standing, with concerns in nine different countries, including West Germany. Where were we?

[[SFX: Petra holds out the bag of dried peaches.]]

PM: Did you want one?

AT: [*defiant objection*]

PM: Sorry. Bad joke. Already got you tied to a chair and gagged in your own dining room, so I shouldn't poke at it like that. I am genuinely sorry, Andy. Sorry for all of this strong-arm garbage I'm pulling right now, but I can't be sure what your level of involvement is. I need you to see how serious I am about getting some answers.

AT: [*questioned pleading*]

PM: You're probably going over every story you've ever heard that starts like this. I know I used to. Still do sometimes, to be honest. It's dressed up different ways, but it's the same tired old power dynamic, every single time. So I won't go any further than this. No threats, no head games to quote-unquote "break you," no violence.

AT: [*cautious optimism*]

PM: I mean it. I'm just going to talk, until you let me know when you're ready to talk. Talk, you understand, not scream for the police. I'd like to leave the place better than I found it.

AT: [*affirmative grunt*]

PM: Thank you. I think strangers sometimes have the best perspective on each other's circumstances. My sister and I got "recruited" into a special school at a young age. That's probably the polite way to put it. It's this kind of government program, with an accelerated curriculum.

[[SFX: Petra bites into a dried peach.]]

PM: Mm. Those are really good. But what might interest you is how I came to meet a guy you know as "Francis Beck." You see how I didn't just say "your golf buddy" or "your work acquaintance Francis Beck?"

AT: [*affirmative grunt*]

PM: Hate to break it to you, Mr. Thurston, but I'm not the only person you know who gets up to a little mischief now and then. When my sister and I… graduated from our program, we had a falling-out about what to do with our futures. One of those arguments you can only have with a loved one who knows all the right buttons to press, and I kind of fell off the map. I've never actually told anyone this before, but I regretted it as soon as she was out of sight. So a few years pass, and I run into my sister while I'm in the middle of… you know what? It doesn't matter what I was doing. Pretty soon after, I go to work at my sister's office. Which brings us to Mr. Beck. He worked closely with our boss, only the name "Beck" was a wooden nickel. But it's the

name he signed his correspondence with you , Andrew James Thurston. My friend dug your name and information out of the supposed Francis Beck's documents, and gave them to me included in a package with a bottle of lavender honey, kettle corn, some chocolates, and these excellent peaches.

AT: [*kettle corn?*]

PM: Chill out, Andy, I'm just explaining how we got here. Beck's documents and other assets were seized as part of an ongoing investigation into acts of espionage he conducted on behalf of Soviet intelligence agencies. Everything he touched turned to shit, and it didn't go the way he thought it would in the end. People have died because of Francis Beck, real name Henry Cornish, and he's not around to say why he did what he did. I don't know how involved you are, Andy. All I get is the occasional "thank you" for "that little headache in the West Germany" you helped him with.

AT: [*rising panic*]

PM: I don't know how angry to be tonight, so I'd rather be calm. But it's hard to be, when I'm so scared. Scared for the world, scared for my friends. I know you're scared, too, and the worst part is, you don't even really know why, not exactly. You can't. I'm not allowed to tell you. I don't know how you'd sleep any better if I did. But I have someone else who needs me right now, so at the end of the day, I'm not that worried about you. Whatever you did, you did because a snake in a black suit lied to you. He wasn't State, Andy. He was CIA, and a grade-A defector. He needed what you could provide, so he made you his tool. I don't want to hurt you, because I don't think you would deserve it. Henry Cornish, sadly, is in no position to be hurt anymore. I want his masters, Andy. I want the location of anywhere I can smoke them out.

AT: [*quietly sobs*]

PM: It's okay, Andy, it's okay. Here, let me get that thing off your mouth.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

[Ext. KTNK Headquarters (Day)]

[[SFX: Sally and Adler walk down a gravel road]]

SG: Gotta hand it to you, this isn't what I expected. Where are we? Can you, like, tell me, or do you have to kill me afterward?

AD: We are a ways outside the city of Steglitz, in West Germany. There is no harm in telling you.

SG: Wow. Not a bad view. For a spook-house, I mean. [inhales deeply] It's pretty awesome out this far. I never made the time to travel like this. Well, not "like this," you know what I mean.

AD: Doctor Grissom, I had hoped to take this moment to clarify a few matters. To be entirely blunt, my agency would like to recruit you.

SG: Yeah, I kinda got that. So much so, in fact, you stole me.

AD: We have compelling evidence to suggest you wished to leave ODAR's influence. These suggestions pointed to your joining ODAR under severe duress. We failed to make contact with you in the manner we hoped. You kept yourself so busy.

SG: I don't like feeling helpless, or being bored. At the end of the day, spies and shit cause most of my "duress." Hank Cornish was one of yours, and I have to say, all his bullshit really took me past where I thought my patience could go.

AD: But you endure it. Why?

SG: Because doing the work, trying to get it right after so many years of being wrong… It's all still worth it. Innocent people don't deserve to take a hit just because I think I deserve a vacation. If I don't at least shepherd the thing I let out into the world, I don't know if I would be fit to live in it anymore.

AD: So you stand with ODAR, in the hope that you can use this technology for the common good. Am I accurate in this much, at least?

SG: I would say that's accurate, sure.

AD: Please, only answer this if you feel you are able. In your original frame of reference, do you feel that this would be likely of "your" United States, if they had an ODAR of their own?

[[SFX: They stop.]]

SG: To be honest, no.

AD: Could you elaborate?

SG: I think fear would have overpowered them. I remember being scared, all the time, for everybody. The only way out of that place that I could see was through the sciences, so that's where I ended up. Now I'm here with you.

AD: Is your fear more, now you are here, or less?

SG: Christ, you really go for the throat. Where is this going? You won't even tell me your name, I don't owe you any answers.

AD: That is true. I am not permitted to share my name, for reasons you can assume. But around here, the German staff like to call me "Adler," for my "proud beak" like an eagle's. Will that do?

SG: Corny, but fine. So what does my level of anxiety have to do with this?

[[SFX: They continue walking.]]

AD: I know you still feel beholden to your home, however you have changed it. I spoke with you about war, and we came away at odds. But you do not want to be afraid anymore. Is that accurate?

SG: Yes. I don't know how long I can live with someone's boot on my neck.

AD: If you could end the war, would you want to?

SG: Yes.

AD: Then we may yet come to an understanding, Doctor Grissom, when the planets align. Please allow me to escort you back to the main building.

SG: Sure, as long as you escort me to some coffee in the process.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

[Ad music]

M: Secret government conspiracies are a lot of work. Every plot to control each and every moment of history down to the finest detail needs good people to make it work. And that means every plot to control etc etc needs a better way to find good people. Something better than posting your position online and just praying for the right co-conspirators to see it.

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[Ext. Military Airport]

[[SFX: plane flies by. Petra is on the phone.]]

BC: This is Chambers.

PM: Hey BC, it's me. Your care package didn't last long.

BC: What a nice surprise. How was the trip, are you back?

PM: Still taking care of the finishing touches, but our friend saw things clearly by the end of our talk. He's turned himself over to us of his own volition, so I expect the bosslady will want a word with him.

BC: That is wonderful news, sweetheart. Great job. Heading home soon?

PM: My flight back's in a few hours. Hey, is Lou handy?

BC: Just outside, I'll give him a shout. You little go-getter, you.

PM: Stahhhhp.

LG: I hear we'll have a new guest soon, nice work. What's on your mind?

PM: Some details I won't broadcast without you in the room, but I know this much. There's a place in West Germany that the two-faced prick had our new friend do a lot of paperwork on. Heavy equipment, machining setups and other assorted hardware. Some visa tomfoolery tossed in, and we have a nice, promising first stop when we go take in the sights.

LG: Sounds like a date to me. We have a way in?

PM: Our new friend can help with that. Said he wants to, that he hates himself for what happened. I saw him make the decision myself; he'll get us a way in.

LG: And a way out?

PM: Still our problem. Listen, I gotta go. Swing by the cabin in thirty-six hours when I'm back and an actual human again.

LG: Until then. Fly safely.

PM: Bye, Lou.

[[SFX: Petra hangs up the phone. Radio tuning.]]

[Int. KTNK Headquarters]

[[SFX: Sally and Adler eat uncomfortably]]

SG: This is weird. Is this weird for you?

AD: You are asking if I often eat with my charges? It is not common, no, but then, you are not common. It makes a good story to tell, at least, when everyone at the party has had a few to drink. “I had lunch with a time traveler.” I can leave you to eat on your own, if you prefer.

SG: Yeah, but then what else would I do with myself?

AD: I have been meaning to inquire about that. I can certainly arrange to find you some books in English, or perhaps a record player?

SG: Yeah, maybe, but… look, am I moving in, or what? I haven’t said I’m helping you yet.

AD: Perhaps the words are only slow to arrive. But no, we hoped to move you to a slightly more secure location, when you felt amenable. Our facilities here are adequate, and remote enough, but like ODAR, we prefer to know exactly who comes and goes. West Germany is high-profile, as you might say.

SG: Yeah, you might. When would I be moved, in that case?

AD: We anticipate a safe window to keep you here for two more weeks, perhaps less. But until we are both satisfied that we can work together, or until the window closes, I would prefer to see you comfortable. In fact, I know what might help you make a decision.

SG: And that is?

AD: When things have slowed down later tonight, I would like to take you to see the workshop.

SG: Seriously?

AD: Indeed. Think of it as a professional appraisal.

[[SFX: radio tuner]]

[Petra’s Cabin (Night)]

PM: [*journaling*] The time is twenty-two-fifty-eight hours, Mountain Standard Time. Flight got in about 40 hours ago, with a blessedly quick onboarding for our new houseguest. Just got off the phone with someone I haven’t seen in a long time. Still not sure where he got my number, but somehow he also knows about the mission coming up. Maybe I knew he was coming. I finally got the last of the boxes unpacked, like, an hour ago, and made up the guest room. As soon as I sit down, the phone rings. Not like a “hey, I’m flying out to Colorado soon,” but more of a “hey, I’m at a payphone on Main Street, where’s your house?” Pretty crazy I guess, but I can’t throw stones.

[[SFX: cuckoo clock]]

PM: Oh shit. Well, that's on the recording now. I can't believe I live in a time where these are still considered pretty wizard. Heh. Oh God, I need more sleep. I can't believe he would say yes to a plan as crazy as this, but he wanted to help Sally. It'll be good to have someone else with his experience on-board. Lou is great, a total professional, but you can't fake jumping back a few decades. Different perspective, right? I don't give a damn what LeMartine says, those Seventy-Sevens give me the creeps, so he'll be on the sidelines just in case things get too hot to handle. I'm not really sure what he wants out of all this, other than to look out for me. Maybe he's just as worried about Sally as I am. He should be, insane long-shot that it is.

PM: But I think we can do this. Just barely. I think that's him.

[[SFX: Nikhil knocks at the front door]]

NIKHIL SHARMA (NS): [*through door*] Young lady, I have been walking uphill for over an hour! I demand you open this door so I may collapse inside! I'm tired.

PM: [*laughs*]

[[SFX: radio tuner]]

[Int. ODAR Briefing Room]

[[SFX: A light switch is flipped off. Tonya walks to the side of the room.]]

TLM: Miss Chambers, if you'd like to get us started.

BC: Yes ma'am.

[[SFX: slide projector switches on]]

BC: Alright then. After spending some quality time with Cornish's files, the portion that remained, we have a name and address for the South Berlin facility where we believe Hank Cornish had been setting up an out-station for his real bosses in the organization we are, for the time being, referring to as "KTNK."

[[SFX: Bridget changes slides.]]

LG: What's that stand for?

PM: Do you speak Russian?

LG: Well, no.

PM: It's the Russian ODAR, just leave it at that.

BC: The station's cover as we understand it is an engineering and consultancy firm, "The Postfenn Fellowship of Engineering and Fabrication," translated from the German.

ER: I've attended plenty of conferences and talks on engineering since hostilities ended in Europe. That's the sort of thing you'd hear about, especially with everything that's happened in Berlin. Funny how I've never heard of this before..

BC: The Postfenn Fellowship is located near Drachenberg (*Drock-en-behrg*), the hill making up part of the South Berlin locality known as the Grunewald (*Groo-neh-vald*). The area is quite affluent overall, an evolution of a mansion colony which began there in the 1880s. Everyone there values privacy, and having their view of the neighbors obstructed. If you're there, the assumption is that you belong. Diplomats and dignitaries are known to attend parties at the grand houses in the area, and in general, the presence of a business would be unusual. In his correspondence with Andrew Thurston–our houseguest from the United States Customs Service–Cornish thanks Thurston for his helping to resolve several "time-sensitive" issues for friends of his at the Postfenn Fellowship.

[[SFX: Bridget changes slides.]]

BC: Thurston's testimony, after remanding himself to our care, corroborates this. Thurston dates the first contact in November of 1950, when he got a call at work. He tells us that, at first, he owed Cornish a favor, for helping a drunk and disorderly charge on his nephew vanish. After the first two or three favors he returned, Thurston began to receive gifts of thanks from Cornish in what he calls "tasteful ways."

[[SFX: Bridget changes slides.]]

BC: We know that the Grunewald locality has been on a list of intelligence targets by the NSA and other international agencies for the last year or so. Findings suggest a few networks currently running, but unproductive. The lion's share of Cornish's "favors" went through in '51 and '52. All this to say, Cornish and his group did a thorough job in putting down roots over the last three-plus years, with two during which no one in particular was looking. Grunewald locality sits within the American sector of West Berlin, so Cornish would have had no problem moving around if he decided to visit.

[[SFX: Bridget changes slides.]]

LG: Sweet little spot he picked. There a lot of foot traffic?

BC: Only if you count couples and small groups on "scenic jaunts." There is a memorial site for Prime Minister Walter Rathenau (*Rath-eh-now*) in the area, since his assassination in 1922. People walking around tend to be quite visible, mostly because they want to see and be seen.

[[SFX: Bridget changes slides.]]

BC: The surrounding area is primarily woodland, with a man-made hill nearby called Teufelsberg (*Toy-fells-berg*), built on top of an unfinished Nazi technical college right after the war ended.

PM: Surveillance will involve kind of a ramble through the woods, then?

BC: Perhaps Agent Vico could help me answer that.

TLM: Ray, if you'd be so kind as to walk us through the structure of this thing.

RV: Ma'am. A lot of ground to cover here, geographically. That's why we'll have two teams in play; one will consist of four members, the other, two. Agents Marquez and Gaines will meet two Seventy-Sevens using the work-names "Alec" and "Gordon." You're the lead group, handling surveillance of the target location. You'll have to confirm the presence of Doctor Grissom, codename "Limestone," before any more pieces start to move. Alec and Gordon will be scouting ahead of your arrival for stake-out positions. In the event Limestone is confirmed on-site, we have the facilities to get you American military IDs and uniforms. That should cover your way in, but extracting Limestone and getting everyone out alive is something you'll have to put together when you get there.

LG: And the other team, sir?

RV: Stationed nearby, in Wilmersdorf. That team will be comprised of Doctor Roberts, and Seventy-Seven Agent Christian. We have a safehouse arranged not far from the Berlin Zoo.

PM: Huh. Sounds nice.

ER: Not as much as you think.

RV: They will be there in case this thing ends in a meltdown, either figurative or literal. A Timepiece will be available, using a two-key system. Both Roberts and Agent Christian will have to agree to activate the Timepiece in order to put the failsafe in motion. Director, they both have clearance to do so?

TLM: That's correct. That contingency is only in case of a catastrophic failure sure to cause widespread death and destruction. The Soviets also have a Timepiece, and we cannot yet confirm what they've done, or intend to do, with it. If you find it, or any materials related to it, your secondary objective is to destroy them as soon as possible. Am I understood?

PM, LG: Yes, ma'am.

TLM: I appreciate the enormous risk you are all taking. However, the reality is that we risk much more in doing nothing. Agent Chambers, thank you and your team for the sterling work done so far, but I want you to keep sifting. If this yields nothing, we may not have time to mount a secondary op. I want us

ready for one, just the same. I know Limestone… Doctor Grissom, will be in good hands. Dismissed.

[SFX: radio tuning]

[Int. KTNK Research Lab]

AD: Some of the researchers have been asking me for an answer about this.

[[SFX: Adler hands Sally some papers]]

SG: Holy crap. I know these. Timepiece Field Kit power specs, field actuator blueprints. Not great quality printing.

AD: Enlarged from microfilm taken by David Marian.

SG: Yeah, I'm sure you're very pleased with yourselves. What answer did they want?

AD: There is a note in the margins– which Doctor Brown is this you refer to? One of your mentors?

SG: I don't really… Listen, it doesn't make a lot of sense out of context. I must have had too much coffee that day.

AD: Ah. Time traveler humor. I will inform them so they can stop badgering me, thank you.

SG: Right, sure thing.

AD: And the device you were found with, the storage device? The... drive?

SG: The hard drive? What about it?

AD: We would very much like to know what it contains.

SG: I'd also very much like that. Not sure where I'd even start guessing. I don't have the code for it, and I don't know who would.

AD: You mean, you took a… hard drive, with no idea of how to access the contents, or even the nature of those contents?

SG: Pretty much. I wasn't sure I was even looking at the right thing when I got it, and by the time I was, you guys had me in your clutches. Sorry.

AD: You don't sound very sorry.

SG: Listen, are you sure–like, one hundred percent dead goddamn certain– that it's okay for me to be down here, seeing all this?

AD: A demonstration of just how serious my superiors are about bringing you, and your expertise, into the fold. One of them is expected to arrive any day now, to judge your condition for herself. You are significant, as I have said. Nothing at all will happen to you. Anyone who treats you in a foolish way, well, they will not be heard from very often afterward.

SG: That's… harsh. Quite a bit harsher than I'd ever want, probably.

AD: Doctor Grissom, I presume that you are familiar with Soviet ideology: that the state, that the collective, is all. But for the collective to be strong, it must have the best teachers. Science may be used for good or ill, but it is neither. It is nothing more than the understanding and responsible application of natural law. You know this well.

SG: Understanding is something you come by gradually. You want a swift end to this war, so you're giving me what I have to assume is an unprecedented level of access into your business. I could wait you out. ODAR must be looking for me.

AD: It's something we have considered. They might succeed in taking you back, like a prize or a favorite toy, and you would remain a state secret. We might not make your true accomplishments known, for such things would shake all of creation. Too significant. But you would be known as a scientific hero, a role model sorely needed in the times to come. No more living alone, feeling like an anchor around the world's neck. No more being forgotten. What is silence worth, Doctor Grissom? What is inaction worth? Nothing at all.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

[Int. KTNK Research Lab]

[[SFX: Sally scribbles notes on a pad.]]

SG: It's a waste of time. Like, I don't enjoy just stomping all over a good hypothesis, but CAGE fields are a dead end.

AD: So you understand everything about these fields?

SG: I thought I was the queen authority on this stuff. Was that not the point?

AD: It was, and is. A privilege, as always, to learn. But you did not make the advances you did by closing your mind to possibilities. That is all my superiors are doing. We follow every scant path in the hope it leads to treasure.

SG: But mostly what you find is a bunch of horse–

AD: Dung, too, is a valuable resource. Much comes from it, when applied in the right spot.

SG: I'm gonna shut that metaphor down right there, I refuse to take any part in it. If you don't have anything else to distract me with, I need to figure

what the hell your techs were thinking. They tried connecting this aperture control backwards, so down is up, and up is down. Chaos rules and somebody is going to get killed if you install that in a live apparatus.

AD: Duly noted.

SG: Listen, I give your bosses credit for keeping an open mind. I don't have every potential application of the CAGE figured out, but the risk factor at this point is too high. What you're talking about is a time bubble. You know how delicate a bubble is, right? How perfectly smooth a lens needs to be to work like a lens? You follow me?

AD: I believe so.

SG: It's not a perfect metaphor. The conditions are so specific, and the decay is so severe by this point, I wouldn't risk sending a person into a CAGE field under any circumstances. We're talking about exposing people to highly unstable energy, which grows less stable every passing hour.

AD: This sounds like very responsible advice. I thank you.

[[SFX: Sally scribbles some more notes.]]

SG: Yeah, well, I just don't want anyone else to get killed. Anyone, got me?

AD: Your position is well understood.

SG: Good non-committal answer.

AD: Oh, I am quite committed, Doctor Grissom, and so are you. To a peaceful world. Good night to you.

SG: Yeah. Same.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

[Int. Steglitz Safehouse]

[[SFX: radio plays West German tunes of the day. Petra cleans her service pistol. There is a knock at the door. Morse code for OPEN.]]

LG: Got it.

[[SFX: Lou goes into the entryway and unlocks the door. Gordon enters, shutting and locking the door behind.]]

77 GORDON (77G): Hope you folks like danishes. Old lady at the counter was sweet and threw in extra.

[[SFX: 77G offers a paper bag]]

LG: Oh man, this is gonna hit the spot, thank you so much.

PM: Thanks. Coffee over there.

LG: Alec relieve you?

77G: I left him about thirty minutes ago. While I was waiting in line, I made some small talk and asked about Postfenn. The cover for the locals seems to be like this: the building got bought out from an old-money type who got scarce of Berlin while the getting was good. The Postfenn Fellowship is a private joint venture by some well-meaning Americans and Berliners, names not yet known to the public.

PM: Neat and tidy.

77G: What's neat and tidy is, American military contractors stop in all the time to hire local techs from the fellowship. It's not like there's a revolving door, but with some IDs and a decent reason to consult in-house, we have ourselves a reliable way in.

LG: If we can bold-face our way through security.

PM: Semi-bold-face. Three of us are already combat veterans of one kind or another.

77G: Which makes you something else.

PM: You bet your ass, Gordon.

LG: Got an address for that Army connect of yours?

PM: We'll need those IDs printed fast.

77G: Once we receive confirmation of Limestone, you'll have it in your hot little hands. You put the cart before horse otherwise. Turnaround time on those will be about twenty-four hours.

PM: You guys ever get used to this hurry-up-and-wait bullshit?

77G: You could try composing haiku.

LG: Taking up chess.

77G: Or watercolors.

PM: Screw this, I'm transferring to the other team. They get to see lions and stuff.

77G, LG: Too late.

[[SFX: Alec comes in through the radio]]

77 ALEC (77A): [*low*] Come in, Castle, this is Alec. Brothers and sisters, Limestone is confirmed on-site. Repeat: Brothers and sisters, Limestone is confirmed on site. I have a visual as we speak.

PM: [*pleased*] No shit.

LG: Castle reads you, Alec. You're 100% on that?

77A: You'd better move your asses, brothers and sisters. Over and out.

LG: You heard the woman. Gordon, get those IDs.

PM: Wait, um… if this is it, we should tell our backup. Esther and Christian. I'll, um… give me one sec, I'll make the call.

LG: Good thinking. It's time, team. We're going in.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

[Ext. KTNK Headquarters]

[[SFX: distant thunder, wind]]

SG: First thunderstorm in another country. Looks like a big one.

AD: I do not expect us to lose power here, unless the wrong trees happen to go down. We have generators to see us through a night, in any case. Although, you may have to forego any work you hoped to do tonight. My superiors have told me of their satisfaction with the direction things in the labs have begun to take since you came to us. The director will almost certainly wish to tell you how pleased she is at your imminent meeting.

SG: Still a little ominous when you say it like that. I have to be honest, I'd be more comfortable with this if I were able to see the full specs of the project. Things like power draw would be easier to work out if I saw something comprehensive. All I know is, it's modular and uses a series of CAGE emitters. That's a little thin.

AD: Unfortunately, it is not within my remit to give you a full briefing on the project. I cannot give you much more information than I already have.

SG: I thought we were trying to build trust here. You can't tell me your name, what you call your agency, your bosses, or what the full specs of this thing are. You can't give me anything?

AD: I do understand. How about this? If you were, say, to find your way down to the main lab tonight after hours–provided we still have power–I may forget to cover up a blueprint for the completed device. On the drafting table near the rear corner. You may have five or so minutes before I realize my mistake.

SG: Um. Okay. I understand. Thanks.

AD: Pardon? I'm afraid you will have to speak up, the wind is making it very difficult to hear.

[*the wind is doing no such thing*]

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

[KTNK Research Lab]

[[SFX: Sally opens the door to the main lab.]]

SG: Hello? Handler… person? Adler?

[[SFX: The door shuts behind SG.]]

SG: Okayyyy. Back corner. There you are.

[[SFX: SG walks to the back of the room.]]

SG: Written in goddamn Cyrilic, of course– wait, what is this? (low, counting) One, two, three… Activation phases set to a… timer? This is bullshit. This is BULLSHIT.

[[SFX: The lab door opens and Adler enters.]]

AD: Doctor Grissom? Is something the matt–

[[SFX: Sally strikes Adler hard across the face.]]

SG: I take back everything I said about your bosses having an open mind, you walking tumor. You take my goddamn tech?!

AD: Doctor–

[[SFX: a second slap connects hard enough to unbalance Adler into a nearby workstation.]]

SG: You steal my tech and jam it in a warhead, asshole?!

[[SFX: tape stopping]]

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ars PARADOXICA was created by Daniel Manning & Mischa Stanton. Season 3 was also written by Eli Barraza, Julian Mundy, Danielle Shemaiah & Tau Zaman.

Episode 31: Control features –
Kristen DiMercurio (Sally Grissom)
Katie Speed (Esther Roberts)
Lia Peros (Petra Marquez)
L. Jeffrey More (Lou Gaines)
Preston Allen (Bridget Chambers)

Arjun Gupta (Nikhil Sharma)
Tina Huang (Tonya LeMartine)
Ego Mikitas (Adler)
Richard Malmos (Ray Vico)
Erin Bark (Archie the Cat)
Zack Libresco (77 Gordon)
Danielle Shemaiah (77 Alec)
Daniel Manning (Andy Thurston)
with special thanks to Isabel Atkinson

Original music by Mischa Stanton and by Eno Freedman-Brodmann. Additional music from Free Music Archive.

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09 20 07 06 13 01 06 07 18 01 13 25 20 18 25 15 12 06 25 24
02 05 26 07 26 24
WEATHER IN MEMPHIS: skeleton
LUCKY NUMBER: four hundred ninety one

32: Riposte

WRITTEN BY ELI BARRAZA & DANIELLE SHEMAIAH
DIRECTED & SOUND DESIGN BY MISCHA STANTON

MISCHA (M): A quick warning: This episode contains graphic depictions of gun violence & severe bodily harm. Listener discretion advised.

[Ad music]

M: This episode of *ars Paradoxica* was brought to you by our supporters on Patreon. This is our biggest, most bombastic season of the show ever. And that's because we actually flew the writing team to one city, and met all together for the first time ever to write this season. It was a profoundly superior writing experience, and it would not have been possible without the donations of incredibly generous fans listening to and loving the show. For as little as $1/month, you can get access to stuff like handwritten thank-you notes, stickers, extra minisodes, behind-the-scenes interviews, and you've even heard a couple of our Patrons cameo in the show! And our Patrons are always the first to hear about our new projects at the Whisperforge. If you can spare it, please head on over to Patreon.com/arsParadoxica and pledge to support us. And while you're there, leave a message for those who already have been! Thank you to all our current Patrons. We love you so much.

[Previously, on ars Paradoxica]

HC: Mister Gaines, I understand you and Mister Marian served in the same unit.

LG: That's right. Three-Eighty-Eighth Mobile Infantry.

DM: I don't have much time. I just want to say that… Lou, if I knew you at all, you're going to come find me one day.

TLM: We have reason to believe that Dr. Sally Grissom is now in the custody of a foreign power.

AD: Doctor Grissom, I have some questions.

SG: Who are you?

AD: I am your handler.

TLM: Petra, I am tasking you to lead the extraction team once we locate Doctor Grissom. Agent Gaines, I want you on that team as well.

TLM: Then let's begin. This is an unprecedented position we find ourselves in, so I am making Agent Vico's team available to you. Petra, you may know them as the 77s. They are trusted with the most dangerous missions because

they are some of the best we have, and have given up their own futures to help fix our present.

BC: We have a name and address for the South Berlin facility where we believe Hank Cornish had been setting up an out-station for his real bosses in the organization we are, for the time being, referring to as “KTNK.” The station’s cover as we understand it is an engineering and consultancy firm, “The Postfenn Fellowship of Engineering and Fabrication."

77A: Brothers and sisters, Limestone is confirmed on-site. I have a visual as we speak.

AD: Doctor–

[[SFX: Sally knocks Adler into a workstation.]]

SG: You steal my tech and jam it in a warhead, asshole?!

LG: It’s time, team. We’re going in.

[Theme music]

[[SFX: tape recorder starts; Sally in the workshop-cell, using tools to open the panel where she believes the keypad to be to enter the room.]]

SALLY GRISSOM (SG): You know, I’m used to getting mixed signals from top secret government such-and-such, but you guys? Hehe... You take the cake. Like, your boss? Adler, what a real fuckin' piece of work. Almost had me there with all the talk of peace and greater good and ending the war but oh then, speaking of war, I find out that the way your people want to do it is with a time travel bomb. Literally a fucking time bomb! You know about that, buddy? Pal? Comrade?

GUARD 1: [grunts dismissively]

SG: So I give him a well deserved punch in the jaw and instead of solitary, you put me back in a workshop! Under the notion that I might somehow still be willing to work on the damn thing! I mean, c’mon, you guys... You guys know I’m gonna try to Iron Man my way out of this thing, right?

[[SFX: The door opens; another Guard enters for the shift change]]

GUARD 2: *[Russian accent]* Anything to report?

GUARD 1: *[Russian accent]* Nothing. She is yelling about Man in the Iron Mask now.

SG: Huh, we’re still in the Golden Age of Comics, huh?

[[SFX: Guard 1 leaves. Sally messes with the door until--BZZZ. Her fiddling causes a spark.]]

SG: Oh shit, what was that?

[[SFX: a nozzle in the workshop sprays gas into Sally's face]]

SG: [coughing] Guys? Guys, what the....

[[SFX: Sally coughs and coughs until she passes out. Guard 2 clicks on their radio.]]

GUARD 2: [sigh] Tech, I need somebody to reset the security protocols.

[[SFX: inaudible response from radio]]

GUARD 2: It was the gas. She should wake up in about 15.

[[SFX: radio tuning; the lobby of the Postfenn Fellowship. Lou, Petra, and the 77s walk up to the reception desk, where phones ring.]]

RECEPTIONIST: Postfenn Forschungsstipendium für Ingenieurwesen und Herstellung, Bleiben Sie bitte am telefon. (Postfenn Fellowship of Engineering and Fabrication, please hold.)

77 AGENT ALEC (77A): Hallo, sprechen Sie Englisch? (Hello, Do you speak English?)

RECEPTIONIST: I do.

77A: We have an appointment in fifteen minutes with Lilienthal.

[[SFX: Receptionist looks through her paperwork.]]

RECEPTIONIST: Ah. Present your identification, please.

PETRA MARQUEZ (PM): This is the third time we were asked for IDs! Jeez you'd think we were consulting with Korolev.

RECEPTIONIST: What was that?

PM: Uh, apologies ma'am, nothing.

RECEPTIONIST: Mm, your IDs seem to be okay.... Very good. Okay, right this way. The other member of your party already arrived.

77 AGENT GORDON (77G): Other member?

PM: Excellent, I wasn't sure if he would be able to make arrangements in time.

[[SFX: Receptionist leads them down a hallway deeper into the facility.]]

PM: Ooooo.

LOU GAINES (LG): Don't touch the bust of Gogol...

PM: Didn't know you were into Russian literature!

LG: ...There's a plaque.

RECEPTIONIST: Please keep up!

NIKHIL SHARMA (NS): Ah, I see you've found my associates! I can lead them back to the Lilienthal's office.

RECEPTIONIST: I really should be the one–

LG: Didn't you leave that caller on hold?

RECEPTIONIST: Fine, please lead them to the office then. Facilities are down the hallway to the right if you need them.

PM: Thank you!

[[SFX: The receptionist leaves.]]

77A: Who the hell are you?

NS: Dr. Nikhil–

PM: We're calling him Lemondrops.

NS: Lemondrops?

PM: If LeMartine can call for backup, so can I. We need more eyes to find Limestone and Lemondrops here is trusted by both me and Sal-Limestone. Capische?

77G: We had a plan–

LG: A plan that doesn't have a lot of time. Can we all be flexible?

77A: Fine, but Limestone is still priority. Let's move.

[[SFX: radio tuning; Sally awakens inside her cell.]]

SG: What... what did you guys put in that stuff? You do realize I already have a history of brain trauma? [sigh] Alright, back to the drawing board. Really could use a Jarvis right about now.

[[SFX: radio tuning; beeps and clicks, servos whirring; Petra approaches, opens the door and pokes her head in]]

PM: Clear. Limestone isn't... wait a second.

[[SFX: Petra enters. She tries to pull something off a desk; it is attached. She tries a few more times, in vain. Nikhil enters.]]

NS: Pst, Petra. I know there are gizmos a plenty in here but I think you would've spotted Sally by now.

PM: It's "Candles" when we're on mission. *[to hard drive]* What the hell did they use to attach you to this table, adamantium?

NS: What on earth are you doing?

PM: Reclaiming stolen property.

NS: In addition to Sally?

PM: Limestone, Sharma! Jesus.

NS: Sorry.

PM: This is the hard drive I gave to her. Looks like they're trying to decrypt it.

NS: Oh, I was helping Sal– Limestone to decrypt it! But, I didn't get far.

PM: Looks like the Soviets are doing pretty well for themselves, here. The fact they have the tech to do this...

NS: I'll stay behind.

PM: What?

NS: You don't bring a medic to a gunfight! You have them off to the side detaching a stolen hard drive while the action heroes get shot at!

PM: You think you can detach this thing?

NS: I'll figure something out.

PM: Fine. If this room gets compromised, meet us by that storeroom we passed, next to the bust of that dead Russian writer guy.

[[SFX: Petra leaves Nikhil in the hard drive room to rejoin Lou & the 77s]]

PM: Keep moving to Limestone's position, Lemondrops is taking care of something.

77G: This is no time for fooling around–

PM: He's helping us kill two birds with one mission. Stone. Whatever! There's plenty of birds to go around. Just keep moving.

[[SFX: They walk down the hallway.]]

PM: This place is capital-S Sad.

LG: You should have seen the plane I took here.

[[SFX: Doctor and Nurse approach from the other end of the hallway.]]

PM: Hide!

[[SFX: The crew scampers to safety; Doctor and Nurse pass by as they talk]]

DOCTOR: And can you please check on our guest in the basement in an hour? I don't anticipate any adverse side effects but without a medical history, it is tricky business.

NURSE: Of course but sir, I wanted to go over Marian's charts in the meantime? We can't keep him here much longer.

DOCTOR: The orders regarding him say otherwise. He's exactly where he needs to be.

PM: *[whispering]* Lou.

LG: What.

PM: We don't have time.

LG: We just left your new surprise backup behind so he could get another bird. David is my bird, Petra. And I've been looking for him for a long time.

77A: We need to keep moving, that guest is probably Limestone!

[[SFX: Beat.]]

PM: Castle is peeling off, looks like it'll be just us, fellas.

77G: What the hell?

LG: You heard the lady.

77A: We gain a man and now we're down two?

PM: Whine, whine, whine! I really gotta stop meeting my heroes.

77G: Fine. You have 15 minutes, Castle.

PM: Good luck, don't be stupid. And Lou?

[[SFX: Lou starts to leave, then turns back]]

PM: I know we can save Sally but... I don't know if you can save David.

LG: See you soon.

[[SFX: radio tuning; sneaking down a hallway; cracking a door slightly; Sally, muffled, inside.]]

SG: You know, I don't mind that you've taken all my recording devices–you punch one KTNK agent in the beak and get put in time out, I get it–

PM: *[whispering, over Sally's lines]* Alright. One on the wall. Armed. I think there's a keypad.

SG: But all the extra bells and whistles, don't you think it's excessive? I mean, you probably have so many other things you'd rather be doing.

GUARD 2: The Director has ensured you have everything you need to occupy your time with working and not talking or escaping.

SG: Yeah, I'm totally gonna help build you guys build this thing.

GUARD 2: Adler will be here soon to take you to the Director, you can lodge all complaints then. For what it is worth, we asked you nicely.

SG: ...You know what? I can just talk to you! The last guard was way less talkative but you and I can get to know each other. What's your name? I'm Sally, Dr. Sally Grissom, I'm sure you already knew that. Hey, this is a nice TV. Is that Technicolor? Still don't have color over here, yet? Do you guys watch a lot of TV? Radio serials? Do you have a .. German Green Hornet or something? The... Red Yellow Jacket? Däs Hornet?

PM: *[deadpan]* God, I'm reconsidering this.

77A: What?

PM: Nothing, nothing. She's actually gonna give us the diversion we need. Just wait for it.

SG: Hey, do you guys have like, the Soviet equivalent of amusement parks in this timeline? What would you call it like... Comrade Mouseman Land? Oh, or, maybe Rasputin Kingdom–wait, you guys don't like Rasputin. What year is it?

PM: *[whispering, to 77A]* Watch my six.

SG: Hey Jigsaw? You There?

GUARD 2: Would you shut up? Your incessant babbling is–

[[SFX: Petra sneaks up behind the Guard and chokes him out; she drop him]]

SG: ...Hey Bueller? You okay out there, buddy?

PM: Ugh. Shut up, Sally. Do you know anything about the code on this thing–

[[SFX: Petra pokes a key on the keypad]]

SG: DON'T TOUCH THAT!

PM: Okay, okay! Holy shit, what is your problem?

SG: I've been trying to crack that code all night!

PM: Shocker, resident genius doesn't follow through.

SG: I was a little busy being HELD HOSTAGE.

GUARD 2: [groans]

PM: Oy, this guy.

[[SFX: Petra kicks him in the head]]

PM: ...Sorry. Okay, no touching the keypad. What kind of lock is this, then?

[[SFX: Petra tries the latch on the door; it's locked]]

SG: *[alarmed]* Stop! Stop. For the love of all that is holy please stopstopstopstopstop.

PM: Okay, fine! I won't help. Do you want to stay in there or something? Please don't tell me you love Big Brother now, I did not cross an ocean to leave your ass here.

SG: What? No. Petra, listen, The door's booby trapped.

PM: No shit.

SG: No! I mean everything I've tried has triggered a fifty shades of fucked up side effect in here. Near as I can tell, the entire room is rigged with some kind of tamper-proof technology attached to a microcontroller that randomly subjects me to one of who knows how many horrible deterrents. You try to take the doorknob off? Boom, sound cannon that has probably permanently damaged my eardrums! I tried disarming the keypad during the guard change, and not only did that not work, it triggered this knockout gas and... look, let's just say I'm basically living a SAW movie in here. And I know you don't follow that but I've lost at least a couple IQ points trying to get out of here so I need you to trust me... okay?

PM: What do you suggest we do?

SG: You knocked that guy out, right? Okay, so, he's got a cattle prod on his belt. Take it from him. And give me a second.

[[SFX: Petra takes the cattleprod from the unconscious Guard's belt]]

PM: Thank you...

[[SFX: A device in Sally's cell starts clicking erratically]]

SG: The microcontroller is somewhere above the door. Last time I tried to do this... let's just say I lost a few hours, alright? Not important. So, I'm going to find this thing

[[SFX: Sally waves the device back and forth until the clicking increases rapidly; Sally flips a switch, and the device starts clicking to a regular rhythm]]

SG: Bingo! Okay. Top left, like two inches over. Can you reach?

PM: Hang on.. *[stretches]* Alright, got it!

SG: Okay, when I say, I want you to Tase the wall.

PM: Are you kidding me?

SG: That would be such a lame thing to kid about.

[[SFX: Petra charges the cattle prod]]

PM: Whatever, Doc. Ready when you are.

SG: Okay... Okay... GO.

[[SFX: Petra zaps the controller; it shorts]]

SG: Score! No more Russian Torture Roulette! Now you can pick the lock.

PM: Are you sure?

SG: We don't have time for a rigorous process of trial and error, here.

[[SFX: Petra picks the lock]]

PM: Mmmmm.... Got it!

[[SFX: The door opens]]

PM: Wow, you look *terrible*.

SG: Good to see you too, Petra. What are you doing here?

PM: Ugh, we'll have time for that later, do you need anything in here? We' need to book it before–

[[SFX: The rat-tat-tat of distant gunfire down the hallway]]

PM: Too late! *[into a walkie-talkie]* Gordon, get down here, take Limestone and rendezvous with Lemondrops where we discussed. I'm going to hold them off. Extraction is imminent, we need to get the hell out of dodge!

[[SFX: radio tuning; Petra shoves Sally along in front of her to meet the 77s]]

77G: This way, Limestone. Stay close, keep your head down.

SG: Why is my name Limestone?

[[SFX: Adler fires a shot at them from down the hallway; it misses, ricocheting off the concrete wall]]

ADLER 1: Stop where you are!

SG: HOLY-OH Shit,shitshitshitshitshit, I'm gonna die–again! We're dead. We're dead we're dead–

77A: Watch your step.

SG: Shit–THEY'RE dead, did you do this? Should I be following you? Who are you anyway?

77A: Damn, you really are a chatty one! Get movin', will ya?

[[SFX: Adler fires two more shots, both miss]]

77G: Limestone, keep going!

ADLER 1: *[approaching]* I do not want to have to do this, I said STOP where you are–

[[SFX: Petra tackles Adler into a wall and forces him to drop him weapon]]

ADLER 1: Foolish American!

[[SFX: Petra kneesAdler in the groin; Adler doubles over. Petra whacks him over the head with a wrench, and he falls. She drops the wrench, then reaches onto his belt and grabs his keys.]]

PM: *[out of breath, calling out to no one]* If anyone else wants in on this, now's your moment!

[[SFX: Down the hall, air displaces as Adler 2 appears; he stalks down the hallway towards Petra.]]

PM: Another of you? Seriously? That's my move!

[[SFX: They engage; Adler grabs Petra around the neck and attempts to choke her, but Petra manages to get her feet underneath her and shove Adler backward into a wall. She elbows him in the gut, then, with effort, flips him over her shoulder and onto the floor Petra breathes hard, until another displacement of air heralds the arrival of Adler 3.]]

PM: Oh, mother–!

[[SFX: Petra draws a gun and cocks it, but Adler locks her arm and tries to pry it out of her hand. She pulls the trigger; the bullet shatters a nearby window.]]

ADLER 3: The contents of the laboratory are highly unstable! Do not shoot in that direction!

[[SFX: While Adler is distracted, Petra scoops to pick up the wrench she dropped and cracks Adler in the knee. He cries out, but only until Petra swings it across his face, and he sprawls out on the floor.

Another displacement of air, but this time Petra is ready. She ducks into the open lab, then as Adler 4 passes by it she trips him, grabbing him by the shirt. Gunfire; Adler 5 shoots several holes into Adler 4, whom Petra uses as a human shield.]]

PM: Thank you for your sacrifice.

[[SFX: Petra drops Adler 4's body to the ground.]]

ADLER 5: This isn't how... You must get away from–

PM: You've got a point.

[[SFX: Petra gets the upper hand on Adler 5. She shoves him into the lab, fires two rounds, then runs the other direction before–BLAM, an explosion rings out from the lab. Petra breathes heavily, shocked. Another displacement of air, and Adler 6 appears right next to her.]]

ADLER 6: You arrogant, violent, selfish... Rrrargh!

[[SFX: Adler advances on Petra]]

PM: *[struggling]* Don't get so down on yourself, Comrade, maybe 7's your lucky number-agh!

[[SFX: Still entangled, Petra and Adler fall through the threshold into the lab. they struggle on the floor until Adler is shot from behind, collapsing onto Petra. She shoves the rcorpse off of her, breathing very hard.]]

ADLER: I have watched myself die so many times today. I have lost count! I keep losing count...

[[SFX: Adler's speech devolves into a raspy, choking cough. He slides his gun across the floor to Petra.]]

ADLER: Kill me. Please.

[[SFX: Petra picks up the gun and aims it at Adler]]

PM: Прости. (Sorry.)

[[SFX: An alarm rings out over the PA system.]]

RECEPTIONIST: *[over loudspeaker]* CEASEFIRE. HOLD POSITIONS. ODAR FORCES: WE WILL NEGOTIATE. BRING US ESTHER ROBERTS.

[[SFX: radio tuning; heart monitor beeps away. Lou enters.]]

DAVID MARIAN (DM): *[old, out of breath]* Never thought I'd see you in a lab coat.

LG: [dry laugh] Was hoping I'd never see you in a hospital bed. It's good to see you, David.

DM: Back in Europe again, Captain. Pity I didn't think to bring my board with me.

LG: Good thing, there's hardly any glory in beating a bedridden man while he's down.

DM: Please, the best you could do was a stalemate.

LG: ...I think we've been in a stalemate for a while, David.

DM: Never did waste much time.

LG: I came to get you out of here, son.

DM: You came a mighty long way to leave empty handed, Gaines.

LG: Oh, it's Gaines now is it?

DM: You know I'm not walking out of here.

LG: I'll carry you.

DM: You've been trying to carry me for the past decade.

LG: Yeah, and look where trying to walk on your own got you! Held by the Soviets in a hospital bed.

DM: I'm a man, same as you, Lou. I made my own choices, same as you. Nobody's holding me here.

LG: Then get up.

DM: [coughing laugh] Real funny.

LG: I'm not trying to be. Look what they've done to you, David. Is this really where you want to be? Is this what you thought it was?

DM: Maybe not. Are you where you thought you'd be?

LG: Maybe not. I didn't expect to have this conversation. I know how to oppose you in chess, David, but... but this? I don't know how to do this.

DM: I'm not going to tip my king here, Louis. Not if you aren't willing to see my side like I've seen yours.

LG: What side is that?

DM: You know what ODAR's been up to for the past ten years. Think. How far does their altruism extend? Past Point-of Exile? Past DC? You think Alabama's feeling ODAR's altruism? How about you? How about your mother? Hell, anyone in your family. How'd you even make it over here, Lou? They sneak you over? You ask me, your goodwill doesn't extend past Colorado these days and deep down, you're fine with that. You cared more when you were a journalism professor who's bark was worse than his bite.

LG: You have no idea–

DM: The only reason you were ever allowed to touch that technology was because ODAR knew it would make sure that you couldn't make any real changes. We could be using the technology to fix a lot of terrible shit back home. And ODAR is never going to let you do that. The United States is never gonna let you do that. I realized that a long, long time ago.

LG: It's far from perfect there–but this is far from home, son. Too far to be throwing stones, I'd say.

DM: They don't care what happens to you, Lou. They never did. You think if you ended up like me, here, you'd be taken care of? Or would they leave you on the side of the road, make you forget you knew them in the first place? At least here, I know who I can trust.

LG: Then how the hell did you end up here? *[beat]* I'm not sure what I expected to find, when I found you. But now I'm staring you straight in the face and I can hardly recognize you. You're not the same man I taught all those years ago. I don't know when you threw all that away, but I don't see it.

DM: You're not looking for it, Lou. You're looking for me to tell you you're right and follow behind you like I always have. I can't do that. And I haven't been doing that. It's just taken a while for you to catch up.

LG: You violated what I was trying to teach you.

DM: I didn't... I don't think I am.

[[SFX: In the hallway, the alarm blares over the loudspeaker.]]

RECEPTIONIST: *[over loudspeaker, in hallway]* CEASEFIRE HOLD POSITIONS ODAR FORCES: WE WILL NEGOTIATE. BRING US ESTHER ROBERTS... CEASEFIRE HOLD POSITIONS ODAR FORCES: WE WILL NEGOTIATE. BRING US ESTHER ROBERTS...

[[SFX: as the alarm blares, the heart monitor registers David's heart failing.]]

LG: David? David? David!

[[SFX: The alarm blares; the heart monitor flatlines; Lou cries; radio tuning;

NS: Lemondrops to Candles. I'm having less luck with this thing than you.

PM: *[over walkie-talkie]* I think we're all running low on luck right now, over!

NS: Did you get Limestone?

PM: On her way to you.

NS: Well, should I go to the rendezvous point or keep trying to get this thing?

PM: Well some idiot agent from 20[redacted] thought it was important enough to send back so... Oh COME ON–

[[SFX: Petra is cut off; footsteps pass by the hard drive room down the hallway]]

NS: Some idiot agent...

[[SFX: the footsteps return, the door opens; Nikhil leans over the desk to type:]]

NS: "HEY LOSER."

[[SFX: Nikhil submits the password, then the hard drive begins to decrypt]]

SG: Is that any way to greet a friend who's been kidnapped by Soviets and forced to build a weapon of mass destruction?

NS: Sally!

SG: Is that the hard drive we've been trying to decrypt? Sharma, how did you...?

NS: "Damnit Sally, I'm a doctor, not a hacker!" I just typed in a password.

SG: How did you know the password? Also, did nobody come to actually save me?

NS: Petra sidetracked me!

SG: Goddamn, this mission is careening wilder than Clara Clayton's horse drawn carriage!

NS: *[disappointed]* Come on, Sally, Back to the Future 3? That's beneath you.

SG: We need to detach this NOW. Oh goddamnit, torx screws? I only have my flathead but it'll have to do.

[[SFX: Sally begins detaching the hard drive from the console]]

NS: Isn't there a fight going on?

SG: Yes, and now would be a good time to guard the door while I–ow, ow, my hand–mother. Fucking. Torx. Screws.

NS: Here, lemme help.

SG: No it's fine, you have sweaty hands.

NS: I do not have sweaty hands.

SG: Sweaty, clammy, whatever you wanna call them, they're gonna slip 'n slide on this flathead like Flubber in Robin Williams' hands!

NS: Oh, Robin Williams... He would've been way better than Billy Crystal!

SG: Oh you poor poor soul.

[[SFX: Alarm sounds over loudspeaker.]]

NS: What did you do?!

SG: *[indignant]* What did I do?!

RECEPTIONIST: *[over loudspeaker]* CEASEFIRE. HOLD POSITIONS ODAR FORCES: WE WILL NEGOTIATE. BRING US ESTHER ROBERTS.

[[SFX: radio tuning; heels click down an underground hallway; a door opens, and Esther steps inside]]

KARLA: Please, sit.

ESTHER ROBERTS (ER): I'd say it's a pleasure to make your acquaintance, but I don't know who you are.

[[SFX: Esther closes the door and sits opposite Karla.]]

KARLA: I'm you. For lack of a better explanation. Or rather, who you could have been, under different circumstances.

ER: [exasperated sigh] Can we cut past the monologue and you just name your terms?

KARLA: ...But do we not both come from places that value the exchange of pleasantries?

ER: You have my friend held hostage and you still haven't told me your name. I don't find that very pleasant.

KARLA: You may call me Karla.

ER: Fine, Karla. I won't ask you how you knew that I'd be close. What are we doing here?

KARLA: We are negotiating Stalemate.

ER: Details?

KARLA: Your friend has been assisting us with a rather complex piece of technology.

ER: I doubt she's been "assisting" you.

KARLA: Your friend may surprise you, Doctor Roberts.

[[SFX: Karla presses play on a recorder.]]

SG: *[on recording]* I take back everything I said about your bosses having an open mind, you filth. You take my goddamn tech?!

ADLER: *[on recording]* Doctor–

[[SFX: Sally punches Adler into a desk]]

SG: You steal my tech and jam it in a warhead, asshole?!

[[SFX: Karla stops the recording]]

ER: So what has Doctor Grissom been working on against her will?

KARLA: A contribution to the balance of power between our two organizations.

ER: A weapon.

KARLA: One that would leave atomic power in the dust.

ER: The United States and its enemies paid a great price for that power.

KARLA: And so would we, and our opposition, should we need to use it.

ER: But you have a different proposal in mind.

KARLA: As I said. Stalemate.

ER: Let's drop pretense and speak transparently.

KARLA: The Plasticity Experiment.

ER: What?

KARLA: The Plasticity Experiment, Dr. Roberts. We will provide you the blueprints for what Dr. Grissom has been working on and you provide us with the key to ending the disease you call Butterfly Syndrome.

ER: The Plasticity Reports are Not on the Table.

KARLA: You don't know how we intend to use it.

ER: I don't need to, Plasticity–

KARLA: –Was a success from my understanding.

ER: Children.... children died.

KARLA: We have many brilliant minds in medicine. We will be able to mitigate–

ER: You've stolen our technology, and now you want me to hand over the key to making yourselves invulnerable with its use?

KARLA: Hmmph. I know how you perceive me. You believe me to be like those you have heard about in the news and in your spy novels. You and I, Esther, we can fix what they have broken. The... anchor point. The point at which all time travel converges. October 28th, 1943. So many mistakes yet to be made. So many lives yet to be lost... And yet.

ER: What you are insinuating is as impossible as it is offensive. If you know what you think you do about me, about my past, about this war, you would know better than to dangle something like that in front of me, of all people.

KARLA: For someone keeping hands off for so long, your palms are incredibly dirty.

ER: Stained red. The way yours will be, if you try going through with this.

KARLA: I'd rather dirty hands by action than by inaction. You and your organization never sought to set what was right because it was against the interest of your government.

ER: You do not get to tell me what I sought out! Don't you dare presume my morality. Not again. My–

KARLA: –I want to do what is right by our people, Esther. And we both have the means to accomplish this.

ER: First you show me the stick and then you dangle a carrot, do I understand your strategy correctly?

KARLA: This technology can give the world a second chance. Isn't that what you wanted for yourself?

ER: What I wanted was never in question. ODAR–

KARLA: We have developed the ideas that you were too afraid to have! I do not seek to blame you, Esther. I seek action. Action that you continue not to take on your own. It is never too late. Especially not for us.

ER: The Plasticity Experiment... you don't know the cost of what you're asking.

KARLA: But you do know the cost of what you have failed to do. What you have failed to even attempt.

ER: There has got to be some other way to accomplish–

KARLA: There isn't. We both know this. Otherwise we wouldn't be here.

ER: I came to rescue my friend.

KARLA: And we won't stop you. You may have Dr. Grissom if you give us those reports.

ER: We should have known this was never about Sally for you.

KARLA: Dr. Grissom is an effective means to an end. I think you should know that better than anyone.

ER: ...The blueprints?

KARLA: We already have a copy prepared.

[[SFX: Karla slides a folder to Esther.]]

ER: What's to keep you from defaulting back to plan B, if your idealism comes to naught?

KARLA: ...A measure of trust you will have to concede.

ER: That's ridiculous.

KARLA: I've found this line of work tends to be that way.

ER: And we leave where we began. With guns drawn, no one pulling the trigger.

KARLA: And a brighter present for it.

[[SFX: radio tuning; Sally detaches the hard drive]]

SG: *Finally*. Think we should wait for Petra?

NS: Pretty sure the loudspeaker just said to hold positions until Esther comes in.

SG: We've got no promises they'll let us go after talking to Esther so I figure we do what we do best.

NS: Ignoring what people tell us to do?

SG: Precisely. So did you guys set up a rendezvous point or what?

NS: We're supposed to meet by a bust of a playwright near the front.

SG: Right. Okay, stuff this under your shirt so we can sneak it out. I'll check if the coast is clear.

[[SFX: Nikhil shoves the hard drive under his shirt; Sally sneaks a peek into the hallway; high heels approach]]

SG: Shit, shitshitshit–

RECEPTIONIST: Ah, there you are Dr. Grissom. I have been instructed to escort you off of the premises.

SG: Um... excuse me?

NS: Yeah, excuse us?

RECEPTIONIST: I've received word to escort ODAR personnel off of the premises. I hope you both had a good experience consulting with us here at Postfenn.

SG: You're just gonna... let me go? Just like that? I am a valuable asset, you know–

NS: Oh Sally! C'mon, let's go... Whatever deal they made, let's not waste it!

[[SFX: radio tuning; an Adler collapses]]

PM: *[into her walkie]* Candles to Lemondrops. Over.

NS: *[over walkie]* Reading you loud and clear. You okay? Over.

PM: I'm fine. That agent won't be a problem anymore. You got eyes on Castle?

NS: Nope, but I have a feeling he can take care of himself. I... I think they're letting us go! They're escorting Sally and me out the front door now.

PM: Alright. I'll rendezvous with you all in Wilmersdorf, heading out from this... storeroom...

[[SFX: Petra stops in front of a door, opens it, and enters. She picks up a piece of chalk, and reads from the chalkboard:

PM: *[in Russian]* "Students, welcome to 19-53?" *[in English]* ...Students, welcome to 1953.

[[SFX: Petra drops the chalk, and takes a shocked step backwards]]

PM: *[furious]* ...We're done, Roberts.

[[SFX: Petra exits the classroom, firing one last shot into Adler on her way.

NS: *[over walkie]* Candles? Candles, you there? Candles, come in please!

[[SFX: Petra kicks the exit door open and walks through; the door slams shut behind her; tape recorder stops]]

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ars PARADOXICA was created by Daniel Manning & Mischa Stanton. Season 3 was also written by Eli Barraza, Julian Mundy, Danielle Shemaiah & Tau Zaman.
Episode 32: Riposte features –

Kristen DiMercurio (Sally Grissom)
Katie Speed (Esther Roberts)
Lia Peros (Petra Marquez)
L. Jeffrey More (Lou Gaines)
Arjun Gupta (Nikhil Sharma)
Ego Mikitas (Adler)
Emma Sherr-Ziarko (Karla)
Sheldon Brown (Old David Marian)
Zack Libresco (77 Agent Gordon)
Danielle Shemaiah (77 Agent Alec)
Mischa Stanton, Pasha Sol, Karim Kronfli, Erin Bark, Kessi Riliniki (additional voices)
with special thanks to Isabel Atkinson

Translation by Pasha Sol. Fight choreography by Danielle Shemaiah. Production help from Jeffrey Gardner. Original music by Mischa Stanton and by Eno Freedman-Brodmann. Additional music from Free Music Archive.

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33: Home

WRITTEN & DIRECTED BY MISCHA STANTON & DANIELLE SHEMAIAH
SOUND DESIGN BY MISCHA STANTON

MISCHA (M): Hey folks, Mischa here. Welcome to the second midseason finale of Season 3! We're almost to the end now. But before we come to a close, we wanted to let you know about some upcoming projects here at The Whisperforge. Just because *ars Paradoxica*'s coming to a close doesn't mean we're done telling great stories for your ears. We've got a ton of content gearing up to hit your podcast apps in 2018. And we'd like to take a moment to tell you about them.

Dropping in the next month or two is StarTripper!!, a space-hopping comedy created by Julian Mundy and starring Ian McQuown of the Bright Sessions as Feston, a former intergalactic bureaucrat and thrill-seeker who left his job behind to chase all the fun the galaxy has to offer. Keep an eye out for the teaser coming in the next few weeks, or follow them on Twitter and Tumblr at startripperhq for more updates!

We're also working on brand-new fiction projects by Tau Zaman, Julia Schifini & Kristen DiMercurio, as well as a couple of nonfiction projects, and a second season of our sister show, The Far Meridian. More news as those wonderful projects develop.

We've got a LOT in store for 2018 and beyond here at Whisperforge HQ, so follow us @TheWhisperforge on Twitter for new developments. And now, without further ado: [clap clap]

[Previously, on *ars Paradoxica*]

KARLA: We will provide you the blueprints for what Dr. Grissom has been working on and you provide us with the key to ending the disease you call Butterfly Syndrome.

ER: The Plasticity Experiment… you don't know the cost of what you're asking.

LG: You violated what I was trying to teach you.

DM: I didn't… I don't think I am.

[[SFX: flatline]]

LG: David? David. David!

PM: Well some idiot agent from 20[redacted] thought it was important enough to send back so...

NS: Some idiot agent... "HEY LOSER."

PM: "Students, Welcome to 1953..." We're done, Roberts.

[Theme music]

[[SFX: tape recorder starts; Bill Donovan's office, 1945; Chet enters]]

CHET WHICKMAN (CW): Director Donovan, you wanted to see me?

BILL DONOVAN (BD): *[coughing]* Thanks for coming in, Chet. Close the door, will you?

CW: Yes sir.

[[SFX: Chet closes the door]]

BD: Have you seen the reports coming in from Germany?

CW: No sir, I've been a little busy wrangling Dr. Grissom today. Something about a television that can see through time, or something. The science is a bit over my head, to be honest.

BD: The trick is understanding how to use it, not how it works. Take a look at this.

[[SFX: Bill hands Chet a document, which Chet flips through]]

CW: Hmm... Hmm. Am I reading this right sir?

BD: If you read that and think "Soviet-occupied Paris" then yeah, I'd say so. They've been pulling troops from across Europe, consolidating their forces for a push across the western line.

CW: Forgive me if I'm wrong, sir, but wasn't the conference at Yalta supposed to curb this sort of thing? Some of the boys think it'll be peace in our time.

BD: I'm not sure they'd think like that if they actually heard how it went down. Stalin's boys had this... swagger, this bravado that I've never seen, even from the reds. Acted like they'd already won a war we aren't even fighting yet. It's this kind of thing that makes me think we'd better get the Blackroom project up and running sooner rather than later. Do we have any assets on the ground in Berlin?

CW: No, the State Department issued an order that–

BD: Right, since we always listen to State here at ODAR.

CW: ...You might want to, sir. Do we really want our materials trapped behind the iron curtain of Soviet Germany?

BD: You're not wrong. Dammit, we're the time travel agency! How did they catch us on the back foot like this?

[[SFX: radio tuning; an enclosed room on an army base]]

SALLY GRISSOM (SG): Diary of Sally Grissom, September 18, 1953. The rescue op's over. I'm headed back to Point-of-Exile. Finally. To whatever's left for me there. For any of us.

Um, since it's been a while since I've had an audio diary: I got snatched by KTNK, the Soviet ODAR... Sovie-ODAR? They kept me in a facility in Germany. And while I was there... Okay, I thought I was fixing little things. Y'know, like a lens facing the wrong way here, or reinforcing a power line feed so it didn't ground out to the casing and zap everyone there. Just trying to keep innocent people from getting hurt while using this stuff, y'know? Even if they're on the other team, they don't deserve to get hurt when it can be so easily prevented. But I... I had no idea what they were building! Every time I try I just... One of these days I'll learn how to keep my big dumb mouth shut.

Then ODAR came in to rescue me. They turned everything they had towards it. And it's a nice gesture, I guess. Even if it wasn't about them caring for me, even if I was just a MacGuffin in their heist movie... even if they only cared because they thought the Soviets were going to use my knowledge against them. Well, they weren't wrong.

And it seems like ODAR top brass aren't the only ones who came out of this mission... disappointed, or, sad, or... Changed. Petra's pissed for some reason, but she won't talk about it with anyone. Roberts wouldn't look anyone in the eye on the way back. Lou Gaines says he finally found David Marian, only to witness his last breaths before he succumbed to Butterfly Syndrome! That's the only reason he was even in Colorado to begin with, and now... what's left here for him? I don't know.

But then again, the worst part of it was that everyone who came to rescue me seemed to have some ulterior motive. They weren't there for me, Sally, fellow human and their dear friend. No, they came for Dr. Sally Grissom, Inventor and Asset. I am... I am so tired of being an asset.

It's been a long trip for all of us, that's all I'll say. We're on a layover in New York, and then we'll be back in Colorado in just a few hours. And once we get back... well, we'll see.

[[SFX: radio tuning; New York City, outside a brownstone. Esther knocks; Miriam answers]]

MIRIAM ROBERTS (MR): Moshe, thanks for coming– Oh.

ESTHER ROBERTS (ER): Hey Miriam. Been a while.

MR: You didn't call first. I would have...

ER: I... didn't want to say anything until I could explain in person.

MR: Esther, it's been months. We haven't heard a word from you.

ER: Can we talk about it inside?

MR: ...Sure. Fine. Come in.

ER: Thank you.

[[SFX: Miriam leads Esther inide, and they shut the door.]]

ER: Where's Mama?

MR: She's out. Playing cards with the hens, I think.

[[SFX: Miriam lights a cigarette]]

ER: Dilemma?

MR: I think they're on a canasta kick these days. Besides, you're the only one who likes that game.

ER: That's fair, I suppose. I've been told I'm bad at teaching it. I must've picked it up from her.

MR: ...So? You have something you want to say?

ER: Yeah, I, um... I just wanted to say that I'm sorry I've been out of touch. It's been quite a year.

MR: So I hear.

ER: Uh... What do you mean?

MR: They came to see us. Government men in black suits. They told us you'd been convicted of treason?

ER: Yes, well, that ended up being a *biiiiig* misunderstanding-

MR: That's all we heard, Esther. That you were imprisoned for crimes against the state! And then a few months later, here you are. No phone call, no postcard, no "hello my family whom I supposedly love I wasn't given the chair in a secret backroom, save a plate for me-"

ER: Well I'm here now, aren't I? I'm trying to explain-

MR: Honestly Esther, I've barely known where you were for the past 10 years, so not knowing if you're alive is nothing new to me.

ER: That's what happens when you work for the government. You can't say much.

MR: Then Uncle Sam picked the perfect candidate! You've had so much practice.

ER: You know what Miriam? You let me know when it's my turn.

MR: Any time between when they let you out of prison and the moment I answered my door! That was your turn!

ER: You just let me know.

MR: It almost killed us! Do you understand? The last thing we knew you were embroiled with this secret government thing, and the next thing we know you're being convicted of treason? Forget letting us know if you were alive, you should have warned us they might be coming for us! You'd think after all this time, after everything that happened in Europe, you'd think to warn your family!

ER: ...I'm here to apologize.

MR: Erev is the day for it.

ER: I'm sorry.

MR: Good start.

ER: Can I get through one fucking sentence, just, please Miriam?! This is so hard! I'm really trying.

MR: I'm sorry. You go ahead, take your time.

ER: [firm sigh]... I'm sorry I left you behind. I saw my way out, and I took it. That's what I knew how to do. it's everything Papa ever worked for. Do you remember, nights in the shop? Papa talking about giving up his whole life just to make it to America... He never regretted it. His family, his land, his home. He left it all behind in pursuit of the American dream. I... I've just been doing what he taught us to do.

MR: I was there, I remember.

ER: And then when I was recruited, it consumed my life. I saw the size of this... this power we'd gained access to... the magnitude of it. You can't even imagine. And I got it into my head that I was the only one who could... Steer the ship, y'know? Protect everyone, never... To make sure we never got stepped on again. Do you understand?

MR: Yes, Esther. I understand.

ER: I've done... some truly regretful things. And I would have done much more, for all I know. And some of them were in the name of America, but... A lot of them were for us. For you.

MR: ...I could have helped you. I could have been with you.

ER: I... I left you behind to pursue the dream. I'm sorry–

MR: He taught it to both of us. He made both of us dream, and then you rode off to chase this dream and someone had to stay! You didn't even think about it. I had to stay behind, because it was never going to be you!

ER: I don't think by my side was the best place to be.

MR: Why did you get to decide that for me? Who were you to decide how I had to live my life?

ER: You don't get it. I'm here today because I regret where that dream has led me. Where it would lead me still, if I hadn't learned better by now. I'm here to tell you... It's not worth giving up everything to pursue the dream. Some things are more important. You were more important. That was all. I just... I hope you can forgive me.

MR: It's a lot to ask for, Esther.

ER: Erev is the day for it.

MR: Why today? Why this year?

ER: Because I don't know when I'll ever have the chance again to say it. This year's the only year.

MR: This year? Why not two years ago, or three? Or ten or twelve or *more*? I've been consigned to rot with this place while you walked among giants. And I have moved past it. Without you. If you're forging yourself a new path, if you are looking for absolution, then I grant it. But I have nothing more to offer you. You left us far behind a long time ago.

ER: I miss you Miri.

MR: I miss you too. I miss you when you're standing right in front of me.

ER: ...Goodbye.

[[SFX: Esther leaves; radio tuning; Petra and Nikhil's cabin; Petra fumes in the kitchen; she breaks a glass]]

NIKHIL SHARMA (NS): Petra, my friend, you have got to chill out a little. You're burning so hot you might set the forest ablaze.

[[SFX: Petra retrieves a dustpan from underneath the sink to sweep up the pieces]]

PETRA MARQUEZ (PM): What do you want me to do, Nik? Esther Roberts gave the Soviets everything they fucking wanted, and now they've got free reign to create an army of child soldiers!

NS: I know.

PM: And I guarantee you, I guarantee you, that for every one kid that makes it out alive, there are 30 more that didn't make the cut.

NS: Petra, I know, I was there–

PM: She just handed it over, and you want me to fucking chill?!

NS: Yeah, just like a little! I'm pretty sure they can hear you in Idaho. And if they can hear you two states away, they can hear you at ODAR HQ and if we're going to do something about this, I'd rather they didn't know about it beforehand.

NS: You done?

PM: *[sitting, out of breath]* Yeah. I'm done. For now. What have you got?

NS: *[with a grin]* Reinforcements.

[[SFX: Nikhil digs into a duffel bag, looking for the hard drive they took from Germany]]

PM: ...Reinforcements?

NS: I figured out who sent the hard drive, Petra. And I feel like a damned fool that I didn't think of it before.

PM: What?

[[SFX: Nikhil searches around the house for the parts he needs to connect the hard drive to a computer in the cabin]]

NS: Well I never considered that... The package. It was sent through official ODAR channels. Proper stamps and everything, do you remember?

PM: Yeah. Far future, even farther than me. But we searched it all over, it never turned up anything. Why?

NS: There was no sign that it was anything other than an official communication from ODAR in the future. No codes, no ciphers, only contemporaneous fingerprints or DNA. So I have no idea how he thought I'd figure it out, let alone you.

PM: What?

[[SFX: Nikhil boots up the computer and begins accessing the drive]]

NS: See, because he told me it would be a transmission. That if I ever picked up a stray transmission, that said "Hey loser." I... I took it literally, I've been carrying around that stupid geolocator for years! I never even thought...

[[SFX: Nikhil types in the password]]

NS: "HEY LOSER."

[[SFX: the computer beeps affirmatively]]

PM: Wait, hold on, I'm sorry. Anthony Partridge's archive was sent to you by your boyfriend who's stuck in the future?

NS: ...Well when you put it like that it sounds like a stupid thing, but it's actually the best news I've had in four years.

PM: But how did Mateo even get ahold of it?

NS: *[as he searches the computer]* I have absolutely no idea. But....

[[SFX: Nikhil clicks on the thing he was looking for]]

NS: I intend to ask him.

MATEO MORALES: *[on recording]* Hey loser. It's me. I don't know what you did when you got back there, but it must have worked. All of a sudden I'm... [[cough]] I'm finding references to new studies I couldn't seem to find before. It looks like someone named Margaret Elbourne is working on a cure? Get me back in the fight, Nik. We'll light the beacons, and all that jazz. I miss you.

PM: ...That's it?

NS: Of course! We'll find Maggie, work out how to cure Mateo, bring him back here and we'll build out from there. We've got the whole archive now, years of mission briefs and schedules. We'll gather a support network, underground, out of sight, and work–

PM: Nikhil, that's gonna take forever! You're talking... you're talking about guerilla tactics. Raise an insurgency? I was hoping for something a little more... immediate.

NS: Like what?

PM: Well... We've got the whole archive now. What we need to do is scour their weak points, we take their supplies right off the wagon, we build ourselves a gun to shoot and we finally make them listen. Because a gun to the head is the only way to get a Director of ODAR to fucking listen.

NS: Yes! Okay, yes, that's good! Hold a gun to their heads, yes! Like a great big time gun!

PM: Not... like a real gun. It's a metaphorical gun.

NS: Right, yes, I'm with you, yah! Um, what are you thinking?

PM: Well, okay... What about the big weapon? The one Sally helped them build?

NS: Okay well she was held against her will–

PM: We take that! We take the plans, or... no, it's probably a lot to build on our own. We wait for one of *them* to build it–

NS: Yes! And then commandeer it for ourselves! I love this! Mateo will love this. So we get him first, and then–

PM: No, we can't wait. We gotta move on this.

NS: Can't wait? Surely we can wait just a little bit of time, I mean it's time travel.

PM: No, don't you see? This is the answer. I mean, the Russians obviously spent way more time weaponizing this stuff than ODAR ever did. But now that ODAR has Sally back along with the plans, defending against this is gonna be their number-1 priority. If we let them get there, we'll have to resort to something else–

NS: Petra, there will always be something else. We'll find a way, the three of us will find a way together.

PM: No! This is good, this is close and within reach and I can–

NS: No, you can wait just a few more months.

PM: Is that all it will be? You don't know. No one knows! None of us have spoken to Maggie Elbourne or any of them in all this time... you don't know if she's on the verge of a cure or at square one!

[[SFX: Nikhil stands to face her]]

NS: Petra, please! I know you're impatient to get started, but this is just silly and reckless. And not just a little bit cruel. I've been here four years, waiting for him to–

PM: Four years?! Aww boo hoo, four years. I've been waiting for this my entire life! Who even knows how long I've been waiting? Twenty-something years, unless I miscounted again? And I don't want to wait one more second for ODAR to plan their next move. They'll always have a next move. It's time I took us to the endgame.

NS: This isn't the endgame! This is a petulant child kicking over the board!

PM: Either way, the game is over, and they didn't win!

[Beat]

PM: Give me the archive, Nikhil.

NS: *[a little afraid]* ...No.

PM: I will take it if I have to.

NS: Petra, it's been four years together. Longer, it's been since you were a child! Would you really cut me down to get what you want, when you want it?

PM: Would you make me?

[A tense silence. Two gunslingers with their hands on their belts.]

NS: ...No.

[[SFX: Petra takes thehard drive, shoves it into a bag, and heads for the door. Before she leaves:]]

PM: When the time comes, and I need you there... you'll stand with me?

NS: It'll be both of us with you. Or neither.

[[SFX: Petra leaves; tape recorder stops]]

[Midroll ad – Hims]

M: You ever get erections? Haha, me too. When consensually applied, erections are fun phenomena to share with friends! But sometimes, they don't do what you want, and it can feel a little frustrating, or embarrassing. That doesn't mean you shouldn't ask for help.

You might not realize it, but a lot of people's self-worth is wrapped up in how they can or can't use what's between their legs! But that's nothing to be ashamed about. You know, a quarter of people Whose Metapods won't Harden

no matter how many badges they have, are under 40? Sexual wellness isn't just the realm of middle-aged couples in outdoor bathtubs.

ForHims.com is your one-stop shop. Hims connects you with real doctors and medical grade solutions to treat erectile dysfunction. No gas station supplements, no snake oil pills: it's real solutions, backed by real science.

Just go to forhims.com, answer a few quick questions, and chat with a doctor for prescription-grade solutions, shipped straight to your door. You can even get Vi[REDACTED] through Hims. It's hard, made easy. Telemedicine, am I right?

Try hims for a month today for just $5. We'll get you started for just five bucks while
supplies last. See website for full details. This would cost hundreds if you went to the doctor or a pharmacy!

Go to For Hims dot com slash ars ED. That's F-O-R-H-I-M-S dot com slash ars ED. For Hims dot com slash ars ED.

[off-mic] :joy: Wait, is our promo code really arsed?

[[SFX: tape recorder starts; Point-of-Exile municipal building, lobby. Helen writes on a form; Sally approaches]]

SG: Hey Shannon!

SHANNON: Hi Sally!

[[SFX: Helen sighs; Sally hands Shannon a flyer]]

SG: I just wanted to leave this for you, and one for Donald in the bursar's office, if you see him around?

SHANNON: Uh, I'll check.

SG: Thanks.

[[SFX: Shannon stands and exits.]]

SG: ...Uh... Helen?

HELEN PARTRIDGE (HP): *[not pleased]* Hello, Sally.

SG: What are you doing here?

HP: That's really none of your business, is it?

SG: Fair enough. Sorry.

[beat]

HP: I'm having Anthony declared dead.

SG: ...Oh.

HP: Unless you can tell me he's not. Can you... can you tell me that, Sally?

SG: No, unfortunately. I don't really think I can.

HP: Well then.

SG: Are you gonna... change your name back? Your maiden name is Cook, right?

HP: I thought about it, but my manager doesn't think it's a good idea. Partridge is the name on the label. Plus he says the imagery of a songbird is worth holding onto.

SG: Gotta push the brand, I gotcha. But... wait, partridges aren't songbirds, are they?

HP: Hmmph... One thing I might really like to see is you giving an ornithology lecture to a Los Angeles talent manager.

SG: Hah, yeah. Congratulations, by the way. All of your... success. I've heard you on the radio more than a few times.

HP: Yeah, thanks.

SG: You deserve it. Really.

HP: Thank you. I'd say it was nothing, but the truth is I clawed and scraped for every bit of it, so I appreciate the recognition. I presume you're still with ODAR?

SG: Yeah, as usual, you know. I, um... I just got back from being kidnapped actually.

HP: *[fumbling]* Oh... I... I'm sorry, I didn't mean.... Where were you?

SG: A, uh, a Soviet base, just outside of Berlin. Close enough to see where the Wall would have been.

HP: The wall? What wall?

SG: Yeah in my time Germany was sort of split-custody between the USSR and the Allied powers, and they literally split Berlin down the middle with this huge wall. Obviously things went a little differently this time around. The Wall'd probably be along the French border or something... none of which you care about. Sorry.

HP: Yes. Well. I'm sorry to hear that. I, um... I'm glad you're not there anymore.

SG: You are?

HP: Yes.

SG: Thank you. *[beat]* Listen, I'm... I'm actually throwing a party, for my, uh, getting back, I'm practically inviting half the town... I don't know how long you're in Point-of-Exile, but... do you wanna come? Maybe sing something for us? I dunno, is that weird?

HP: Hah!... Yeah, I can do that. I'll sing the song I wrote for Anthony. A sort of farewell-sendoff.

SG: That'll be good. Here, it's gonna be at the rec center.

[[SFX: Sally gives Helen an invitation. Shannon returns.]]

HP: I'll be there.

SHANNON: I can't seem to find him, do you just wanna leave it for me and I'll make sure he gets it?

SG: Yeah that's fine, I guess. Thanks. I'll see you later, Helen.

[[SFX: Sally goes to leave, then stops.]]

SG: Wait. So if you're not changing your name back, why do you need to have Partridge declared dead?

HP: ...I'm engaged.

SG: Oh, wow. Really? Wow. Congratulations.

HP: ...I'll see you at the party, Sally.

[[SFX: radio tuning; Tonya's office. A knock.]]

TONYA LEMARTINE (TLM): Ah! Come on in, Dr. Roberts.

[[SFX: Esther enters.]]

TLM: Have a seat, please.

ER: Thank you.

TLM: Welcome back, I hope the trip was smooth.

ER: A few bumps, but none of them on the plane.

TLM: Well, I've heard the reports from the field agents, but I wanted to get a sense of what happened from you. How did everything go?

ER: Well... we got Sally back, of course. And we recovered the plans for the Soviet, uh... I'm not sure there's another word for it other than "doomsday device."

TLM: Yes I've got the file on it here. A missile array outfitted with CAGE emitters, working in concert to cover entire cities and age them into dust. Hmm.

ER: Sally's been calling it "Weaponized Entropy for Large Targets," or WELT.

TLM: Hmmph! She does have a knack for names, I'll give her that. And the Soviets just... gave this to you? And let you walk out scot-free?

ER: No, Tonya, of course not. We had to give them something in exchange.

TLM: What was it?

ER: The Plasticity reports.

TLM: Plasticity? But, they've had immunized agents in the field for years, we instituted that project to keep up with... Hah. Damn. They got us again.

ER: I'm sorry.

TLM: It's not your fault, Esther, truly. You made a hard decision, and but the playing field is even. The stalemate continues. I'm not sure what I would have done differently.

ER: Mm.

TLM: ...But you're not sure it was the right choice.

ER: No.

TLM: Would it help if I told you I'm not sure the you I remember would have done it differently either?

ER: Not in the slightest.

TLM: What's on your mind?

ER: I used to be so sure, of everything. Even in the face of adversity. But eventually, the evidence stacks up. I'm not sure I'm capable of making the right choice.

TLM: Hmm... Sometimes there is no right choice. Sometimes it's just the lesser of two evils.

ER: Yes. But I'm very tired of being the one to pick which evil.

TLM: ...What are you saying?

ER: I'm saying, I am so glad you are here, running things the way they ought to be run. With 20/20 foresight, and with a confident woman at the helm. And I think I'm ready to not be the one running it anymore.

TLM: You're just... you're just going to leave?

ER: Yes.

TLM: Where do you think you'll go?

ER: Oh, I'm not entirely sure yet. I've got a few ideas–

TLM: Where do you think you'll go, that we won't find you?

ER: Um... I'm sorry, Tonya. I wasn't aware I would have to hide. I'm just stepping down, I'm not selling secrets.

TLM: I think you'll agree your recent actions have shown that whatever secrets you may possess aren't entirely safe anywhere except for under our supervision.

ER: That's a solid tactic. Compliment me for my decision in one breath, then condemn me for the same decision with another–

TLM: Esther, you need to be here.

ER: Well I don't trust me here! And I'm tired of hating myself for being myself! And, I'm tired of being told this is the only thing I'll ever do. I'm Esther Roberts, I can do whatever I set my mind to.

TLM: That's just about what I'm wary of.

ER: Wary? What are you so afraid of, Tonya? Why do you need me here? What purpose do I serve for you that you can't fulfill with years' worth of notes, written in my own damn handwriting? What is it?

TLM: Esther. You ran this place for decades. It became a superpower, within a superpower, and you at the top. I was the Director of ODAR immediately after you. You trained me for the job. And I... I idolized you. Esther Roberts, sharpest mind of a generation, a woman who truly knew what it took to keep the ship running. To make the hard play. And you handled it all with such clarity... God, what happened to you? How did you ever get from here to there?

ER: ...Maybe I never did.

[Beat.]

TLM: You may have flown closer to the sun than you'd like to, but I know that no one builds better wax wings than you do. And I don't think I can trust you where I can't see you. You see how having you off on your own, with your own personal agenda, as the head of this organization I can't allow such an asset out of my sight?

ER: Come on, Tonya. We both know I'll never not be in your sight again. No matter what I do.

TLM: So much paperwork. A whole detachment of agents, year-over-year... Just more cost-effective to keep you on the payroll.

ER: The other option is to keep me here against my will, Tonya. Are you really prepared to do that?

TLM: ...There was a time.

[[SFX: Esther stands with a laugh]]

ER: Keep running things, Tonya. Run it openly and honestly. You're the first person in that chair I've seen doing that, and it's a good look. And if you get really stuck on something, I'm sure you'll send someone to appear mysteriously on my doorstep. And until that day, every time I feel the gaze of a reconnaissance agent on the back of my neck, I'll smile and think of you fondly.

TLM: If you see them coming, that is. There's nothing I can do to change your mind?

ER: Not after this week, I don't think so.

TLM: Well then, I suppose it's been an honor, Esther Roberts. Best of luck in your... future endeavors.

[[SFX: radio tuning; Lou's apartment. A knock at the door.]]

LOU GAINES (LG): One minute!

[[SFX: Lou goes to the door and opens it.]]

LG: Hey Bridget.

BRIDGET CHAMBERS (BC): Hey there. Mind if I come in?

LG: Uh, yeah sure.

[[SFX: Bridget enters, Lou closes the door.]]

LG: Can I get you tea, or coffee or something?

BC: Uh, well... do you have anything stronger?

LG: *[chuckles]* Is the sun past the yardarm already?

BC: I won't tell the captain if you won't, matey.

LG: [laughs]

[[SFX: Lou retrieves two glasses with ice from the kitchen. Bridget sits. Lou pours two whiskeys.]]

BC: I've been meaning to talk to you about... about Germany.

LG: You heard?

BC: I heard enough. I heard you found David.

LG: ...Mm.

BC: And what happened?

LG: When I found him, he was.... He was in the medical wing. And he could barely lift his head to speak to me. I mean, his face had all these new lines in it. I don't know if that's the time travel, or... or if I just hadn't seen him in a long, long time.

BC: What did you say?

LG: Nothing but I missed him, and that I was there to take him home.

BC: He was too weak to move? I know it would have been hard to get him out of there–

LG: Bridget... he refused.

BC: What? No, I don't–

LG: He stared me in the face, and told me with his dying breath he didn't regret a single thing he'd done.

BC: Oh... Oh Lou...

LG: Yeah, it hurt. But you know what? He didn't say anything wrong.

BC: Like what?

LG: Oh, you know. ODAR looking out for ODAR, as usual. Even though I'm in a position of authority, that I'm just far enough from the center of power to actually affect change. That the American government isn't in it for all of America, just the parts they like. He's certainly not wrong there.

BC: He's not wrong, but if that's the fight he's willing to hang his hat on, David Marian was a fool.

LG: Tread carefully here, Bridget.

BC: No, he was. You want to know why? Because he believed that great Communist lie: that they're the party of the people. I think it's–I think it's hard to grasp how much we've actually done here, Lou. It's the way that whenever we've changed something, we only get to see the end result. That time at Oxford, for instance.

LG: Hmmph. That's the kind of thing I'm talking about.

BC: What do you mean?

LG: It was a dozen cases of the sniffles! The British would have gotten the cure one way or the other, somewhere down the line. And while I was off on that mission, Chet Whickman was scheming behind the back of a Korean armistice negotiation!

BC: They didn't tell you?

LG: Tell me what?

BC: I get the summaries before they shelve the closed cases... Did you know that one of the students you saved was a German attending on a scholarship? About to be sent home on holiday? And that his whole hometown had, in the years previous, been ravaged by crop-killing insects?

LG: What does that have to do with–

BC: He used to always get so sick, because of the malnourishment. His parents worried he'd never make it. But in September of 1951, after the summer holidays had come and gone, that boy joined the military. Did you know that soldier was assigned protection detail for Herr Heinrich Gossner?

LG: ...You're kidding. The treaty signing? The soldier that took the bullet for Gossner–

BC: Wouldn't have been there if he had died in the summer of 1951 from a case of the sniffles. See? Just because you can't work every mission, just because you aren't the one in charge... That doesn't mean you're not still saving hundreds of lives.

LG: And that's fine, for politicians in Europe. Funny how every move we make helps white people, hmm? How come Gossner got to sit on his ass while his countrymen slaughtered people like me, and makes one speech and we're all supposed to give a damn, but black boys and girls in Kansas don't get heat in their classrooms! When's their turn, Bridget? When does that little item reach the top of ODAR's priority list?

BC: I... I don't know.

LG: Not soon enough. It's never soon enough. And that's what David was saying. That ODAR... Sure they'll give me an inch, as long as I'm useful to them. But the minute I try to help anyone who looks like me, just wait and see how fast I fall.

BC: So, what? Are you looking to defect too?

LG: As bad as things are here, I won't kid myself into thinking it'd be better over there. Not like him. Still though.... I don't think my place is here. This is not the place where I can change what really needs to be changed. Because those things are built in from the start. I've gotta start from the ground. Build something new. Sometimes, you just have to admit what you've been doing isn't working, and start over.

[[SFX: Lou takes a sip of his drink]]

BC: I've thought about it before these past few years, about giving it all up... But then I see one tiny sliver of light, one baby step in the right direction, and... it's almost like I can't help myself. I come running back, no matter what else there is, and I... I can't tear myself away from her.

LG: You know in your head it's the right move, but you feel like - if you can just stick it out for one more week, one more day... eventually you can get to the light. Like eventually we can all live in that place. Yeah, you understand. Shame it doesn't always work that way. [Beat.] You said "her", you know.

BC: ...I've been in love for too long.

[[SFX: Doorbell]]

BC: Were you expecting someone else?

LG: No offense, but I wasn't even expecting you.

[[SFX: Lou goes to answer the door]]

SG: Hey Gaines.

LG: Hi Sally, what can I do for you?

SG: I just wanted to let you know, I'm uh... I'm throwing a party, down at the rec center. I'd love to see you there.

[[SF: Bridget joins Lou at the door]]

BC: A party? Are you feeling up to something like this?

SG: Oh hey! Yeah, it's uh... it's actually sort of, in spite of that? "I'm home, I'm not dead, I'm safe, come get drunk with me," y'know? Bridget, you're welcome to come too, of course.

BC: Sure, of course.

LG: Wouldn't miss it.

SG: Cool. Um, here's the info.

[[SFX: Sally hands Bridget and Lou a flyer]]

SG: I'll see you there. Take care.

[[SFX: radio tuning; a rockin' party. Sally taps on a microphone from onstage to get everyone's attention.]]

SG: Hey, can I uh, can I grab everyone's attention for a second please?

[[SFX: the party simmers down]]

SG: Listen, I just wanted say thanks for coming tonight, I know it was a little short notice. I just wanted to say that living here has been... Well, it's been a really meaningful time in my life. You know I moved here in '47, along with the rest of the Organization Too Secret to Know...

[[SFX: crowd laugh]]

SG: And there's been... so many ups and downs in the time that I've lived here. I've met a lot of really great people... yeah Shelley, even you.

[[SFX: crowd laugh]]

SG: And uh, and as much as I may have railed against it in the past, I don't think I would trade my time in Point-of-Exile for the world. But... It's time for a new chapter in my life. This isn't just a welcome-home party. It's actually my goodbye party. I'll be leaving Point-of-Exile by the end of the month.

[[SFX: crowd disappointed "aww"]]

SG: See, I really appreciate that! I can't really tell you how much. But it's time I set out for new adventures. I'm looking for a change in my life, and part of that is being true to what I need, and letting myself have it. Some of you may have figured this out, but I'm not from around here. And I never expected to stay as long as I have. I never thought my life would look like this! And I don't just mean a small town of folks I've grown fond of, smiling back at me as I make a fool of myself in front of a microphone.

[[SFX: crowd laugh]]

SG: No, see... um... About ten years ago, give or take, I invented a machine. And it never really worked as intended. Because the first time I ever turned it on, I was overwhelmed with a burst of energy, and when my vision cleared I was in 1943. Which is not where I started.

That day, ten years ago... I accidentally invented time travel, and... I'm from the future.

[[SFX: crowd grows rowdy]]

SG: And since that time, I've been working with the Office of Developed Anomalous Resources to use time travel to gain an upper hand in geopolitical brinksmanship. And they've had me keep this secret for ten years. The core of my identity. And I'm done lying, and I'm done living in secret. I think it's time more people knew. That's my new chapter.
So, in the spirit of new chapters, and without further ado, I'd like to invite my friend Helen up to the stage. She's an incredible singer, and she's back in town for one night only. So here's Helen Partridge, enjoy, and thank you and.... Yeah. Enjoy the party!

[[SFX: weak, confused applause; Helen takes the stage]]

HP: Hey there, Point-of-Exile, how are you doing tonight? This song's dedicated to anyone whose lives have changed for knowing Sally Grissom, you tidal wave of a woman.

SG: Woo! Flirting! ...Yes!

[[MUSIC: the band strikes up into "When I'm Not Here"]]

SG: I'm surprised you didn't stop me.

TLM: I thought about it.

SG: So LeMartine. Now everyone in town knows our secret. What do you think?

TLM: I think that Esther Roberts handed me her resignation this afternoon. I think I've been fighting uphill against a Soviet agenda that it turns out we helped create. I think we need something history's never seen before. Who's to say this isn't it?

SG: Really?

TLM: Well if it's not, I can send someone back to stop you later. Doesn't have to be today.

SG: *[laughing]* You know, Donovan and Whickman were never as upfront about their plans as you are.

TLM: Kinda scary, isn't it?

SG: It's like... it doesn't matter if we know what you're planning. Cause you're always one step ahead anyway.

TLM: I was hoping you'd stay on, to help us come up with something to combat the WELT.

SG: As glad as I am that the name caught on... I'm done here, LeMartine. I really think so. It's Time.

TLM: Isn't it always?

SG: But, I suppose, if you ever get really stuck, give me a call.

TLM: Oh, I'm sure we will.

SG: Yep... I'm sure you will.

TLM: Well best of luck out there, Sally. Whatever you do. You're a legend in my book either way.

SG: ... Dammit, I still have no idea if you really mean that, or if it's part of some agenda you're playing.

TLM: Can't it be a little bit of both?

SG: I guess so. Thanks, LeMartine. I think.

[[SFX: music swells; Nikhil approaches Sally]]

NS: Bold move, Grissom. I like it.

SG: Nikhil! You came!

[[SFX: they hug]]

SG: But wait, aren't you worried about LeMartine spotting you?

NS: I've gotten pretty good at sticking to the shadows, I'll be ok. Besides, I'm only here to see you for a spare moment, and then I'm gone.

SG: Is Petra with you? I haven't seen her since we landed.

NS: Yes, she, uh... She couldn't make it. I'm sorry.

SG: Uh, well... alright, I guess. I'll catch her another time.

NS: Listen, I just wanted to tell you... I think getting out is a good plan.

SG: Oh yeah?

NS: Yes, well, after what I found in Germany... I know what I need to do. And I don't think I can do it here, hiding in a cabin.

SG: *[disappointed]* Yeah, I... I'm sorry Nikhil, but I really thought you came to Germany for me.

NS: Sally, I did! Of course I did. I'm so glad we got you out of there.

SG: But...

NS: ...Okay, well there was something we accomplished on the way. Of course.

SG: Of course.

NS: And, well. I found what I needed. It's time to get Mateo back.

SG: Mateo? I'm sorry, you found something in Germany that's gonna help you get back to Mateo?

NS: Mateo's coming back to me.

SG: Oh. So, you're not gonna... you didn't find like, a way to establish other anchor points, or–

NS: I'm working on a new angle. Something a little less Time Traveller's Wife, a little more Red Dawn.

SG: Oh. Big change of plans.

NS: Not so big to me. I spent four years in a cabin deciding what's important to me, Sally. Just like you've finally figured out what's important to you. No more living in secret, no more hiding, no more ODAR running your life.

SG: Look at us go.

NS: I love you, Sally. And I'm proud to see you taking care of yourself.

SG: Thanks Nikhil. I love you too. And I'd invite you along, but–

NS: No, that's alright. We've each got our own path now, and I think it's time we walked them.

SG: But... we only just got each other back. You'll stay in touch, right?

NS: Of course, yes! You better write to me, once a month at least. Or I'll track you back down and make you write them myself!

SG: How will I know where to find you?

NS: Oh. Uh... I hadn't thought about that.

SG: Hah! Classic. We'll figure it out before we both leave, don't worry.

NS: Take care of yourself, Sally.

[[SFX: They hug, again.]]

SG: Thanks Nikhil. You too.

[[SFX: the band finishes the song; the audience applauds]]

BC: Hi, can I get a–

ER: She'll have a Tom Collins with a fistful of cherries.

BC: Of all the gin joints in all the world...

ER: It's good to see you again.

BC: Even if it's a couple days late.

ER: *[sigh]* Yeah. We should talk. I owe you-you deserve an apology.

BC: *[laughs]* Just the one?

ER: Let's take a walk?

BC: ...Sure.

[[SFX: The band strikes up a ne tune as Esther leads Bridget into the stairwell]]

ER: I assume you've heard about everything that's happened.

BC: No, I'd been waiting to see you first. I have my guesses.

ER: You're disappointed.

BC: *[a humorless laugh]* That would require some element of surprise.

ER: ...Yeah.

BC: Esther, I–

ER: Wait, I just... Wait. Before you say anything, can I just explain myself? Please? And then I promise you can say whatever you want.

BC: ...Go ahead.

ER: Do you remember the night I left, Bridget?

BC: Which time?

ER: I guess I deserve that. *[shaking it off, a laugh]* The first time. I said we'd made it to a point past my being able to continue with the way things were. I was a little harsh in my phrasing–

BC: To put it nicely!

ER: Okay, a lot harsh. But do you know what was beneath it all? I'd—I hit a wall, Bridget. I was in love with you and on the precipice of breaking through in my career. A chance to get ahead, with no regard to my heritage, in spite of my gender. [beat] And as long as you were looking at me... it made it so much harder to do what I knew I needed to do. I knew I needed to make ruthless decisions and I couldn't, because you were there to tell me I was wrong. So I made you into an anchor, and I cast you away, and–

BC: That's a lot of mixed nautical metaphors in between you absolving yourself again. What are you getting at?

ER: I didn't realize it until it was too late, but I... think I fell in love with ODAR, too–don't laugh at me, this is the only way I can explain it! The idea of it, or myself as a part of it... somewhere along the way. And it made me foolish. Bridget, I made these stupid decisions and refused to see things as they really were, and I guess I've been thinking, since Germany... I think I finally understand. Myself. Or who I will be, on the path I'm on now. I can't imagine myself as the kind of person who doesn't become... the person everyone knows I become.

BC: Alright. So what are you going to do about it?

ER: I... I don't want to be what everyone thought I was at the trial. I don't want to be what the future thinks I am. I don't want to be the woman who leads ODAR for decades, who sacrifices children on the altar of the greater good. I've gotten a few glimpses now of what I'm like when that power's in my hands, and... I don't like what I see. It's terrible, and it's a little bit frightening. Honestly, I don't know how I haven't scared you off by now.

BC: I'm not quite sure of that myself. Honestly, Esther, I think something happened to you over there. Something you're afraid to say. That's why you've been avoiding me. And if it's as bad as I think... maybe we're right to be afraid.

ER: That's why I'm walking away. From all of it. I'm done, Bridget.

BC: You're leaving ODAR.

ER: Yeah, Birdie. I am. And I'm–I'm sorry it took me this long to figure it out, and I'm not expecting you to congratulate me or say anything at all really, and I'm not asking you to pick up your life and follow me, again, but... I owed it to myself to admit out loud what I've learned, and you're... you're the only person I wanted to tell, so here goes: I want to get as far away from

this job as I possibly can! I don't like the person I am when I'm around it, I don't want to be that person anymore. I need to make a different choice. It's not the logical one, but–

BC: Sometimes you just need to admit that what you've been doing isn't working, and start over.

ER: Exactly. That's exactly what I–

[[SFX: Bridget steps forward and plants one on her]]

ER: What was that for?

BC: It took you long enough, but you finally came around.

ER: So? What do you say?

BC: What do I say? I say, let's get out of here!

ER: Really?

BC: Hell yes. Let's get out of this town. Second star to the right and straight on til morning! Where to first?

ER: Well, if we're gonna do this, we've gotta do this right. And there's no one who thinks she knows how to do that better than–

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

SG: So basically what you're saying is you want to go all Thelma & Louise & Louise and set off on the open road together, saving the world one not-evil science experiment at a time? And you're fully aware of everything that I just said to the room, and you're cool with the fact that I will most likely be saying a big "fuck you" to everything we've established here, and there are bound to be more than a few people who aren't gonna be happy about that, right?

ER: I don't understand the reference, but that's exactly what I'm saying... I think. And all the better. I'm serious about this, Sally. I'm done with ODAR, but I'm not done trying to improve the world. If I got nothing from being here, I got a good idea of how best to do that, the money to make it happen, surprisingly, and I... I know who I want by my side, now.

BC: Me too!

ER: Maybe nothing else is a sure thing, but it doesn't have to be, anymore.

SG: I can tell you really mean that, Roberts. And... I'm really proud of you. For getting here on your own.

ER: So?

SG: So I'm gonna... I'm going to have to pass, you guys.

BC/ER: What?

SG: Look, I'm with you, and you know that if you needed me I'd be there for you in a heartbeat, even if I didn't entirely want to be, I think I've proven that a couple times over at this point. But I meant what I said, too. And I think for me that means I have to get away from everyone, from all of this. And I hate to say it, Roberts, but that means you too. At least for now.

ER: Alright...

SG: Hey, don't look at me like that. If I was going to go Rogue with anybody, I think I want it to be you. But this is something I've got to do on my own terms and - I think you'll thank me for it later. Besides, no offense? But I can tell by the way you're looking at each other that you two have a lot of catching up to do, and I will barf if I have to be the third wheel on this amoro-scientific tricycle all the way across America.

BC/ER: [laugh]

ER: I'm going to miss you, Sally.

SG: Hey, In an infinite subset of alternate timelines, I'm right there with you. And there's no way in hell we don't run into each other again in this one. *[beat]* Esther, If you ever get stuck, and I know you will... Call me, alright?

ER: That's a two way street, Dr. Grissom.

[[SFX: they hug]]

SG: *[sincere]* Catch you at the next sunset.

ER: ...What?

SG: I dunno. It's like a catchphrase. We never really established one.

ER: Sally, I love you... but that's fucking stupid.

[[SFX: radio tuning; outside the rec center, Esther lights up a cigarette. Petra cocks a gun in Esther's face.]]

PM: Come on. It's time to finish this. Put that out. Don't look at me.

ER: *[sigh]* Petra–

PM: Don't. There's nothing you can say to me now that you couldn't have told those fucking Soviets, so you can just keep your fucking mouth shut.

ER: If killing me is your goal, I applaud you doing it to my face, intellectually-speaking, since I know you're about as lethal three miles away

as you are three paces, but in that case I'd rather you just get it over with, [starts walking forward] because I'm rather tired and I don't think I'd like to contemplate the metaphysical aspects of my demise any longer than I absolutely have to. So. Shoot me, or talk to me.

PM: ...Thirty seconds. Fifty Words or less.

ER: I'll do it in four. Petra, I'm leaving ODAR.

PM: ...Twenty-five seconds, Dr. Roberts.

ER: I think we want the same things.

PM: *[humorless laughter]* Actually, saying THAT is why I should shoot you. Get to the point: If you're really leaving, where the fuck are you going? Fifteen seconds. Thirty-nine words.

ER: To become someone other than the person who was there in that room–who made the decision that I made. I'm going to fix it.

PM: Every fix you've ever been a part of has a body count, Roberts! Forgive me if I'm not buying it.

ER: I resigned this afternoon. I want to do good. Better.

PM: And what, I'm supposed to just let you off with a warning so you can ride off into your
Redemption Arc guilt free?

ER: You could come with me.

PM: *[disgusted]* ...With *you*?

ER: You're smart and you're capable. Your methods are... certainly not my own, but I think that as long as we want the same things–and I can assure you that we do–it might be in both our interests to help each other. I can't undo what I've already done. Not in the way you'd want me to. But hurting me isn't going to relieve your pain. And even if you're willing to give it a try? Maybe something that actually stands to do some good is a better Plan A.

PM: How is it that you manage to hit rock bottom and still be a smartass? Are you aware that I could kill you right now?

ER: You could. I'd probably deserve it. But we both know that's not what you came here to do. You want justice. And ultimately, peace. So do I. Come with me, Petra.

PM: Fuck you.

ER: It's not a ploy. It's a genuine offer. Take it or leave it, I mean it. I'm going to use what I've learned here for good.

PM: ... Maybe we do want the same things, Esther, but I didn't survive 96% of my classmates by buying into everything that comes out of your mouth, and I'm not going to start kneeling at the altar of Esther Roberts now.

[[SFX: Petra puts her gun down]]

ER: So I guess this is goodbye.

PM: This is "don't you ever fucking call me, and if I see you again, it won't be as friends." But you can call it farewell if it helps you sleep at night.

[[SFX: Petra begins to walk away]]

ER: I hope you find what you're looking for, Petra.

PM: *[with a lough]* Honestly, Esther? You should probably pray that I don't.

[[SFX: tape recorder stops]

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ars PARADOXICA was created by Daniel Manning & Mischa Stanton. Season 3 was also written by Eli Barraza, Julian Mundy, Danielle Shemaiah & Tau Zaman.
Episode 33: Home features –

Kristen DiMercurio (Sally Grissom)
Katie Speed (Esther Roberts)
Lia Peros (Petra Marquez)
L. Jeffrey Moore (Lou Gaines)
Preston Allen (Bridget Chambers)
Reyn Beeler (Chet Whickman)
Arjun Gupta (Nikhil Sharma)
Tina Huang (Tonya LeMartine)
Rob Slotnick (Bill Donovan)
Susanna Kavee (Helen Partridge)
Bernardo Cubria (Mateo Morales)
Sammi Lappin (Miriam Roberts)
Rina Cerame (additional voices)
with special thanks to Isabel Atkinson.

Production help from Brandon Grugle. Original music by Mischa Stanton and by Eno Freedman-Brodmann. This episode also featured the song "When I'm Not Here," written by Tau Zaman, arranged by Evan Cunningham, performed by Evan, Chris Tedesco on trumpet, and vocals by Susanna Kavee.

ars PARADOXICA is brought to you by Hims, and The Internet: This is what the whole problem is about.

20 09 05 16 03 05 26 24 12 22 09 25 12 05 13 21 14 19 06 22
09 09 17 09 03 05 24 22 05 04 17 14 13 07

WEATHER IN TULSA: queer

34: Path

WRITTEN BY DANIEL MANNING, MISCHA STANTON, ELI BARRAZA & TAU ZAMAN
DIRECTED & SOUND DESIGN BY MISCHA STANTON

MISCHA (M): These may be our final few episodes, but we've got plenty more projects in store. To see what we're doing next, follow us on Twitter @TheWhisperforge.

[Ad music]

MISCHA (M): This episode is brought to you in part by ForHims.com. And today I'm bringing in a little help. Hey Dan.

DAN (D): Hey Mischa.

M: So, talk to me about men's health.

D: I mean, right now on our podcast? Jeez, Meesh, talking about health is weird, and awkward, and we have to talk about hair loss telemedicine shampoo and I don't like talking about my health because it's weird.

M: Yeah but we have to and you agreed to be on this one and now you've got cold feet. Give me the facts.

D: Two-thirds of cismen experience hair loss.

M: Cismen! You-a-one-a-those, right?

D: Sure, I guess.

M: You experiencing hair loss?

D: Not really, but you know, I do sort of struggle with–

M: Hims! You gotta go with hims! Their hair kit's got scientifically-proven doctor stuff that'll help you keep the hair you've got!

D: I don't really appreciate you blackmailing my hair but uh, there's studies and stuff. Oh my god there's science here. Holy shit. Wow, this is really nice.

M: Yeah?

D: Well, health stuff always makes me anxious, because I don't really feel like I understand it a lot and I'm afraid to ask because I don't want to look stupid. And then I wait and it gets worse. But here they tell you, like, why they are prescribing these things to you and what the medicine is and what it does to you. This is empowering. I'm feeling empowered.

M: As a cisman? With hims's help?

D: Sure.

M: We got it! We got the endorsement!

D: [*pitching voice*] You sure did. Thanks to science, baldness can be optional. Hims connects you with real doctors and medical-grade solutions to treat hair loss.

M: Medical-grade, over the internet? How's it possible?

D: Expanded telemedicine laws in the US! You might even call them relaxed!

M: That sounds convenient!

D: You just have to answer a few quick questions and a real doctor will review and prescribe you.

M: But surely, they'll ship the package to a random spot within a ten mile radius of your home?

D: Nope! To your door!

M: Wow! Our listeners get a trial month of hims for just $5 today right now while supplies last. See website for full details. This would cost hundreds if you went to the doctor or a pharmacy!

D: Go to https://forhims.com/ars. That's https://forhims.com/ars. (https://forhims.com/ars)

M: Gotta say it three times.

[Previously, on *ars Paradoxica*]

SG: June, Ben, Maggie... Whickman says we'll find them. For their sake, I hope we never do.

NS: When June Barlowe writes about the beacons at the end of her life… it's a little dramatic, right? But she had to have some method of passing the torch.

MM: What if the beacons June was talking about… are numbers stations?

PM: STUDENTS, WELCOME TO 1953.

TLM: I take it you and Agent Morales are... close?

NS: I'm sorry, I—

TLM: You know, he doesn't have many trips left him. His last was supposed to be indeed his last journey back through time. It'd be unwise for his health.

SG: I'll be leaving Point-of-Exile by the end of the month.

[[SFX: crowd disappointed "aww"]]

ER: ...I think I'm ready to not be the one running it anymore.

TLM: You're just… you're just going to leave?

ER: Yes.

TLM: Where do you think you'll go?

ER: Oh I'm not entirely sure yet...

PM: "STUDENTS, WELCOME TO 1953..." We're done, Roberts.

[Theme music]

[[SFX: tape recorder starts; Sally driving]]

SALLY GRISSOM (SG): Diary of Sally Grissom, September 28th, 1953. Possessions are in storage, bags are packed, goodbyes were said, one angry Archie in a cat carrier, and I'm finally hitting the open road! I'm gonna take my act on tour, revealing the Great ODAR Secret to the world. It worked pretty well at the party, and LeMartine's been true to her word... as far as I can tell... Eh, we're still living in an iteration of time where she didn't stop me.

But there was no way I was gonna stop after one tiny little mountain town! I've gotta get this story spreading like wildfire. Make it go viral, I mean if that were a thing yet. And I figure, the best shot I have to spread news quickly without the Internet is newspapers. I'll give it to a reporter, have him do a deep dive into ODAR. I think my first stop is Denver. Hopefully they'll pick up the story and it'll spread from there, but while they're vetting me I'll take my story east: papers in Chicago, in Atlanta, in DC and New York and Boston. I mean *someone's* bound to pick it up, right? A massive government time-travel conspiracy? That'll push paper for sure.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

SG: Diary of Sally Grissom, December 11th, 1953. I'm in Baltimore today. It's been six weeks since I started talking to reporters about ODAR and stuff, and... *[sighing]* I guess I'm about ready to call it. Either LeMartine suppressed the story, or they couldn't fact-check anything I said, or... Or maybe they all really thought I was as crazy as their facial expressions suggested, and didn't even bother to try. Hey, it's okay. You knew this might happen. Which is why I went out today and bought this!

[[SFX: Sally taps some keys on the typewriter]]

SG: I figure, if I can't get anyone to write it for me, I'll write the damn story myself. I've got enough here to make something out of, probably. I mean... like, by mass, half of everything I own is audio diary. I can spend a while transcribing, fill in the rest with my refreshingly irreverent and effusively sesquipedalian prose, and it might actually end up coming out somewhat book-like! I mean, I knew a couple of people who wrote entire novels in a month. That Nano... Nanomo... that thing, where you write an entire novel in a month.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

SG: Diary of Sally Grissom, March 26th, 1954. So here's the thing about writing a book. It actually takes like, a really long time? And I'm trapped in my room all day, writing and transcribing and listening to myself... I'm feeling a little trapped in here! I wish I could just, like, pack up my laptop and work from Starbucks. But the equipment's a little bulkier and...

[[SFX: types on typewriter loudly]]

SG: I don't think my local diner would appreciate the commotion. Anyway. I was on the phone with Roberts, she wanted to confirm the check amount this month. And she mentioned that she might have, like, a gig for me? I dunno. Something to get me out of the house. She said someone she knows in the physics department at the U of Chicago is getting sick, and might need a fill-in through the end of the semester. I asked if they'd ever had a woman teaching in that department before. Roberts couldn't tell me. So. That'll be an adventure I guess.

[[SFX: radio tuning; a hallway in the University of Chicago]]

SG: Diary of Sally Grissom, April 5th, 1954. So... The professor I'm filling in for is Enrico Fermi? Maybe... I.... I mean I know he's sick but do you think he'd read my book?

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

SG: Diary, May 15th, 1954, OHMYGOD he actually read it. Which, I'm just gonna take a second and bask in the joy of Enrico *freaking* Fermi, the architect of the nuclear age, actually read my book! Hah! Oh man, that was nice.

What he actually said about it... less nice. I mean, he believed me. He worked on the Manhattan Project, of course he'd believe me. He just... wasn't sure if anyone else would. I admit that it's a little too much my word against theirs. My kingdom for a Freedom of Information Act.

Well, I'll keep working on it. Looks like Fermi isn't gonna come back to school in the fall, so the University will have an opening. A captive audience, hm. Maybe I'll stick around awhile. Plan out my next move.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

SG: Diary of Sally Grissom, July 24th, 1954. The book's not really gone anywhere, I mean I passed it out to a few people in the field, Fermi, Feynman, Bohr. Tried to get Einstein a copy, but it's pretty hard to talk to that guy, as you'd expect. But the rest of them were right. ODAR doesn't need to quash the story; people are perfectly content to ignore it on their own. I gave another lecture at the bookstore, one or two nibbles, but mostly a wash. These... Ugh! These people! A grand government conspiracy staring them straight in the face and no one wants to worry! No one gets it! Their lives are completely out of their control, I just... I wanna shove this information into their eyeballs and–

[[SFX: radio tuning; Sally driving in the rain]]

SG: Diary of Sally Grissom, September 8th, 1954. I thought it would be better, I thought I could just sink down into the lesson plans and let the details slip out slowly, but... It's like there's an itch behind my eyes that won't go away. Yelled at another student today. In the middle of the lecture. Just shouted right at him. I knew it was wrong, I knew it wouldn't get me anywhere. I just felt it bubbling up, and I... What is wrong with me?

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

SG: Diary of Sally Grissom, May 13th, 1955. Found out today I probably can't stick around at the University for another year. To be honest I'm surprised they let me stick around this long. I've only got a few lectures left before the end of the semester, and then... it'll be time to pack up again, I guess.

[[SFX: radio tuning; a classroom]]

STUDENT 1: If yer from the future, what's going to happen to me?

SG: That's not how it works! I don't know everything that happens!

STUDENT 2: Come on Dr. Grissom, why should we believe you?

SG: Listen, the government is messing with your history! Not just mine, yours!

STUDENT 3: Well, I don't remember anything changing!

SG: That's because... UGH of course you're not going to remember it!

STUDENT 2: Can you take me back to the future with you?

SG: Were you even listening to me? You can't travel to the future, you fucking moron!!

STUDENT 1: I can't wait to travel to my future, getting far away from this class. Come on guys, let's get out of here.

[[SFX: Students muttering as they leave Sally's lecture]]

SG: No, guys, come on! I.... ugh.

[[SFX: Sally turns off her overhead projector and puts away papers into her bag]]

JACK WYATT (JW): *[from the back of the hall]* That went well! I thought you really had them by the end there.

SG: Yeah. Thanks. Go on, class is cancelled today. Maybe we'll be back tomorrow. Who knows.

JW: ...Is that any way to treat an old friend, Dr. Grissom?

SG: ...Holy shit. Jack Wyatt.

JW: Hi Sally. Long time.

SG: I didn't even recognize you with the beard! Wyatt. It works for you.

JW: UH, I think you're mistaking me for someone else. It's me, "Scott Palmdale." That's my name. Your old friend, Scott Palmdale. Anyone who can hear this can hear that my real name is Scott Palmdale.

SG: Oh, uh, Scott, uh, Palmdale okay.

[[SFX: radio tuning; a diner]]

SG: How did you even know I was up here?

JW: I heard through the grapevine that some crazy lady teaching physics in Chicago was shouting about traveling through time and government conspiracies. And I figured if ODAR hadn't shut you down yet, I was probably okay to take a peek.

SG: Yeah, they seem to have called off the dogs. Probably because they knew no one would listen to anyway.

JW: Hey, someone listened long enough that word made it back to me, and these days, I don't see a lot of people.

SG: Yeah, it seems like quite the farm that you and... Jennifer?–

JW: Yeah.

SG: —Have going on out here.

JW: There have been a few up and down years, but it certainly beats our old employer.

SG: And twins, that su... that's uh, that's exciting, right? Must keep you busy! ...I don't know, kids are *not* my thing.

JW: *[chuckling]* I didn't peg you for a family woman. But yeah, John and Penelope really are my joy. It's nice to have something to work for, to make the world a little better for. Instead of just feeling sorry and hurt all the time.

SG: John and Penelope, huh?

JW: ...We uh, we wanted to keep the names in the family. Palmdale's the third name we've used since we left, but it's all they've ever known so they can grow up carefree.

SG: Who else was there?

JW: Well, at first we were Jack and Penny Angstrom. That one barely got us out of Wyoming. We figured first names probably needed to go, too. After that, we were "Lester and Eunice Scrabblemeister."

SG: HAH! The things people will submit themselves to for love...

JW: Yeah, we flew too close to the sun with that one. Apparently, there's a board game? I dunno.

SG: And now, Palmdale.

JW: Palmdale. [beat] So none of your other ODAR buddies wanted to jump ship with you?

SG: There's one guy who owes me a road trip, but he had to go off and save the world, or his love, or something. Roberts is out, she's started her own private thing, I've mostly tried to stay clear of–

JW: Esther? Out of ODAR? You got a bridge you wanna sell me, too?

SG: Scout's honor.

JW: How the hell did Donovan allow that?

SG: Donovan's dead, my dude. He's been dead. He died like, right after you left.

JW: Hmmph. Serves him right.

SG: Whickman took over. He got fired too actually, after Roberts's trial.

JW: Her what?!

SG: Wait, when did you leave ODAR?

JW: ‘47!

SG: So you missed... *[mumbles a couple relevant things: “KTNK, Anchorites, Blackroom”]* Jeez, everything! Way to get going before the going got weird.

JW: Things *got* weird? *After* I left?

SG: You have no idea. Hank Cornish, the Anchorites, the KTNK. After the Soviets kidnapped
me–

JW: *[interrupting]* What?

SG: –was the last straw, probably. Donovan said I could leave after I won the Great War, and I did that, Jesus, almost a decade ago.

JW: The Great War was the other one. And our friends in Alamogordo won ours.

SG: Well, “tomayto tomayto.” And now I’m here. Shouting it all to a brick fuckin’ wall.

JW: Well. If it’s any consolation. I certainly believe you.

SG: Thanks Wy-... Scott. It’s nice to hear it every once in a while.

JW: But maybe you should try talking to people who want to hear what you’ve got to say about it all? Not just the undergrads who are trying to learn basic physics?

SG: Hmm. Yeah. I’m, um...I'm not really sure why I’m doing that.

JW: ...You ok?

SG: I don’t know. I’ll think about it. It was good to see you.

JW: Yeah, you too. I should probably start heading back. Long drive ahead of me.

[[SFX: Jack stands]]

JW: Hang in there, Sally.

[[SFX: radio tuning; phone line ringing; recording clicks on]]

PETRA MARQUEZ (PM): Ah, hello? Yes, hello, this is Pee Wee Reese calling! Don’t have a full game plan yet for the world series. Did you send those invites out yet? Oh! And do they have those foam fingers this year? The ones that point up and say "#1 Team" or whatever? I’d kill for one of those. Still trying to figure out how I can get my hands on a hot dog cart.

...I know there's probably an easier way to go about this but man, I really love the full baseball aesthetic. And when a girl retires early, she's gotta figure out how to fill her time somehow. Haha, fill her time, figured you'd appreciate that of all people. Just like old times.

Anyway, you get any leads on a quality hot dog cart, you let me know. Never thought I'd go this far as a baseball fan but the Yankees are going DOWN this year so we gotta celebrate that in style. Talk to you soon!

[[SFX: voicemail beeps; radio tuning]]

SG: Diary of Sally Grissom, May 24th, 1955. I've been thinking a lot about what Wyatt and I talked about, about me kinda... just shouting at anyone who will listen. Why have I been doing that? Why can't I be smart about it? I was on one track, and then I just... I settled down in Chicago? What was that about?

This weekend I think I really need to sit down and check in with myself. My behavior is... was... has been... pretty erratic. For a long time now, I've been bouncing from one thing to the next. City to city, position to position... in ODAR, out of ODAR, back in, back out... I can feel myself doing these things, but I'm not sure if it always makes sense. There are little gaps, little errors in the logic. I haven't noticed them for a while, but... I dunno. I think this may be a bigger issue than I thought.

I don't think I wanna go back to an ODAR doctor for a check-up, though. Hmm. I wonder what Maggie Elbourne is up to. Gotta figure out how to track her down.

[[SFX: radio tuning; college cafeteria]]

LOU GAINES (LG): Well, after David died, I realized I had no reason to stay with ODAR. And I saw the way the wind was blowing. I thought it was a good time to leave, after you and Ms. Roberts and anybody else halfway straight started dropping like flies.

SG: Well, I wouldn't say strai– Oh, you mean like, morally upstanding? Wow, English is problematic.

LG: I bummed around for a while, but I realized I missed teaching. There's not a lot of work for a guy like me with a resume like mine, but I found somewhere I can actually make a tangible difference. They have me teaching international relations.

SG: Ooh, fancy. I'm sure you've got a lot to say on the topic.

LG: Not a lot that I'm cleared to speak on. So what brings you to the humble Alabama State College? Considering going back to school? You wanna be a teacher?

SG: Actually, I've been lecturing at the University of Chicago for about a year now.

LG: No kidding!

SG: Yeah! Well... looks like I might not be cut out for it. They basically fired me.

LG: Hey, I've been there, if it makes you feel any better.

SG: They... they may have had a pretty good reason, actually. That's kinda why I'm here. I've got a favor to ask you. It's not really a big one, but also it's kind of definitely a big one.

LG: Am I going to regret this?

SG: I need to know where Maggie Elbourne is.

LG: *[chuckle]* Oh yeah. Gonna regret this.

SG: It's... I've got Butterfly Syndrome. And I mean, I know I had it once before and was mostly cured, back in 49. But it... I think it's still there. Creeping, underneath the surface. Thoughts, patterns of behavior I can't quite explain.

LG: Why do you think it's Butterfly Syndrome, Sally? It could just be you. *[beat]* I mean, no offense! I just mean that it could be something entirely unrelated.

SG: I dunno, I can just... I feel it. It's like, I can feel myself making decisions on a whim, and it messes with my sense of continuity, y'know? I feel like I can't predict my own behavior. And when I sat down and really took a hard look at it... I really dug into myself, I'm not saying I'm trying to shirk the work. But when I looked at it all together, you know what it looks like? It looks like someone who doesn't know if they've already done what they decided to do, so they flit from action to action, because whatever you decide, or don't... It's all mixed up. I don't know what I will or won't do, so I end up doing anything, or nothing, or even failing to start. It's gotta be BS. I can just... In my head, Gaines. I can *feel* it.

LG: When the rest of the Anchorites left, I was sworn to secrecy.

SG: Come on, I'm not asking for the family Barlowe's secret underground volcano lair. I just need to see Maggie Elbourne. For good reason!

LG: And for good reason, I promised that not a soul within ODAR would ever see them again.

SG: And I'm not in ODAR anymore. Plus, I don't believe in souls.

LG: ...You really need her?

SG: Unless you want me to go back to ODAR, but I'd *really* rather not. She's the only other option. And I've gotta know.

LG: *[sigh]* ...Fine.

[[SFX: Lou flips a page in his notebook and writes down something]]

LG: You've got to go alone. You take back roads and if you're even a *little* bit suspicious that you're being followed, you call it off.

SG: Of course.

[[SFX: Lou tears out the piece of paper and gives it to Sally]]

SG: Huh. I never thought she'd end up in [redacted].

LG: That's the idea. Keep your damn voice down.

SG: *[whispering]* Thank you, Gaines. You're a lifesaver. Literally.

[[SFX: tape recorder stops]]

[Ad music]

M: Hiring the right people is a chore. It's complicated, time-consuming, and especially for us spies, you don't always find someone with the experience you need. UH, sorry, I meant, especially for spies, like the intelligence community. I'm not a spy, obviously! But I do know what it's like! To hire people, not to be a spy, silly.

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[[SFX: tape recorder starts; Sally dives down a dirt road and pulls up to park]]

SG: Diary of Sally Grissom, May 28th, 1955. I finally tracked down Maggie Elbourne. At least, I think I have. Gaines gave me the location off some backwoods road in [redacted], where I had to drive my car half a mile through

some sorta desire path that I'm still not sure I followed right, but here I am, in front of a homey little cabin...

[[SFX: another vehicle approaches from the distance]]

SG: Oh shit. I was followed. Fuck, Gaines was right, I shouldn't have come here, shit shit shit!

[[SFX: the vehicle pulls up right alongside Sally]]

SG: Wait a second, is that...?

NIKHIL SHARMA (NS): Sally! Hey Sally!

[[SFX: Sally gets out of her car]]

SG: Nikhil?!

NS: What are the odds!

SG: About even, I guess. Elbourne?

NS: No, I got lost on the highway. In [redacted].

SG: Ugh, get over here.

[[SFX: they hug]]

SG: How've you been?

NS: Been better, buddy. How about you?

SG: Yeah, about the same.

[[SFX: Maggie kicks her front door open]]

SG: Whoa!

MAGGIE ELBOURNE (ME): What will you be doing at my house??!

NS: Maggie! It's okay!

ME: Who the hell were you?

NS: Dr. Nikhil Sharma, at your service, or the opposite, actually–

SG: It's cool, he's a friend. Hell, if he was alive at the time he'd be your friend!

NS: Well I actually WAS alive at the time, I just–

SG: Not the time for this.

ME: Will you have been followed?

SG: Not by anyone.

ME: [scoffs]

SG: Except him. It's okay, Maggie. Just put the bat down. We're all on the same side.

ME: Says the woman who works at ODAR.

SG: I left ODAR! I'm gone!

NS: We're not with them anymore.

SG: It's okay. We just want to come in and talk.

ME: ... Fine.

[[SFX: Maggie retreats into her cabin; Sally and Nikhil follow. A rat scurries across the floor]]

SG: Hmmph. Cozy.

ME: Careful, Pandora. Careful.

NS: Dr. Elbourne, it is truly an honor.

ME: Have we met? Are we meeting? Will we meet?

NS: One of those three. Certainly in another mutation of the timeline.

SG: Nikhil's with the Anchorites. One of the first, actually.

NS: Well, I really just followed June's lead from my own time.

ME: I understand... The smell of the future lingers on you, Dr. Sharma.

SG: Thank you for bringing us in.

ME: God, June and Lou will both promise to me that I will never... would, never have to participate in your escapades again. I'll believe that my precise words are: Send me as far away as you can, hide me as deeply as you can. They must not be as capable as they promise.

NS: We wouldn't have come to you unless it was important, Maggie. We need-

ME: You need the cure for Butterfly Syndrome. Or, at the very least, my help to have solved it.

[[SFX: Maggie begins frantically searching through the cabin for something.]]

SG: Yes, exactly.

ME: You think I'm the final word on Butterfly Syndrome? Don't you remember? I was the experiment. I may have produced work, but only in the service of Dr. Carling's research. You'll have problems? Go find him.

NS: It's not like that.

SG: We're not with ODAR. Not anymore.

ME: I knew, I knew... know. I was mad; not at you. I understand that if you sought me and found me, you have few other options, but give an old woman the right to have been grumpy. I'll be in the middle of a crossword when you'll arrive.

NS: Maggie, is everything alright?

ME: I'm fine. Searched for something. You'll appreciate this. Surprised you weren't here sooner. Where will it be? Where will it be?

SG: Could we help you? Is there any way–

ME: Ah! It is found. Just as prophecy foretold.

[[SFX: She grabs a stack of papers and holds them aloft.]]

NS: Is... is there a prophecy about this?

ME: Anything's a prophecy if you say it'll be.

[[SFX: She drops the stack on the kitchen table]]

SG: What's this?

ME: The answers you seek.

[[SFX: They pull out files and start leafing through]]

NS: This is incredible! Is this how you cure it?

ME: I can only assume. It's not my work. At least, not yet.

SG: Is that the BS talking, or...?

ME: Two years ago, I received mail. This was odd–for reasons you could expect, I haven't often get mail. A thick brown envelope stuffed with notes and papers and literature I had written from some iteration of my own future where I will have finished my research. Sally, you're mentioned in here.

Multiple times. I could only presume you assisted in the production of this. For that, I will thank you.

SG: No problem, presumably.

ME: It arrived days before June Barlowe appeared on my doorstep, a delirious Ben Quigley in her arms. We were able to nurse him back to health. I'll suspect you want the same thing. Someone's sick, aren't they?

NS/SG: Yes.

ME: Then take it.

NS: Thank you, you're a lifesaver. In more ways than one.

ME: You're not out of the woods yet. Something will be missing that I can't replicate here.

SG: What do you mean?

ME: This compound, here. I'm not familiar with it.

NS: May I?

[[SFX: Maggie hands over the page]]

NS: Oh, I think this is cortichronopine. It's a drug, it minimizes erratic neuron growth in the particular ways demonstrated in Butterfly patients.

ME: It's too complicated for me to synthesize with my own tools.

NS: We make it by the bucketful back there. What a shame.

SG: I mean... how hard would it be to be to get some? In 20[redacted].

NS: Not hard, there's probably a bottle with more than you need to make as much of this formulation as you want in the medicine chest of any halfway-decent ODAR infirmary.

SG: Easy peezy, Mateo sends it back, we synthesize it or whatever and then he jumps back to arrive after whenever we've finished.

ME: Mmm... Every wake the Timepiece leaves will make it harder for your friend to survive long enough to press the button on himself.

SG: Right so, what if you had two Timepieces set to go off simultaneously in his time, one for him, one for the chortichronopine?

NS: They're highly classified pieces of equipment, Sally. He's not just going to stroll out with a cart-full!

SG: Hmm.... How long would it take you to assemble the cure if you had the cortichronopine?

ME: Half an hour, perhaps.

SG: Could you do it in five minutes, if you practiced?

NS: I'm nervous about what you're implying, Sally.

ME: I was too.

SG: Okay, so we get the cure and everything ready, everything except the cortichronopine. You call Mateo back and ask him to grab a bottle on the way. We make the cure and give it to him.

NS: While he's dying right in front of us.

SG: If he doesn't die, he's not really dying, is he?

ME: ...I've heard weaker arguments.

NS: Is that really the move, though? That sounds awfully unsafe.

SG: Yeah, I think so, I mean unless you've got a better idea. *[beat]* No seriously, please tell me if you have a better idea. This is a terrible plan.

[[SFX: radio tuning; phone line ringing]]

PM: Sandy Koufax calling! Finally found a decent foam finger factory down south, so we should be all set on that front. Where am I sending them? Hot dog carts are proving to be a little trickier, but it's not like we can just settle for some peanuts and Cracker Jack.

What... What would those even be? I'll bring it up at the next team meeting I guess.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

NS: Alright, I want you both to go through it with me one more time.

SG: Roger.

ME: I begin prepping the volatile parts of the mixture at 11:53, to be ready for the cortichronopine at noon.

NS: Yes.

SG: At 11:58 you and me stand here, like this.

NS: Mhm.

SG: Mateo appears at exactly noon. You and I catch him, and ease him onto the stretcher. I pull off his jacket and get the cortichronopine from his left breast pocket and pass it to Elbourne, while you administer the sedative. Once he's down and the cure is locked and loaded, we flip him on his side, and you find a spot on his spine to make the injection, and then mark it with this pen.

ME: I administer the cure, and Bob's your uncle.

NS: That's the one.

SG: Alright, this is happening whether we want it to or not. Gears of fate are moving. Let's get ready.

[[SFX: tape fast-forward; Maggie mixing chemicals]]

NS: Alright, thirty seconds. Maggie, you ready?

ME: I'm on track.

SG: Three... two... one...

[[SFX: Mateo pops into existence, and Nikhil and Sally catch him.]]

SG: Okay... here we go...

NS: Easy does it, easy does it...

[[SFX: They plop Mateo down onto the stretcher]]

MATEO MORALES (MM): *[dazed, shaking]* Hey there... hot... stuff...

[[SFX: Sally pulls off his jacket and searches it for the bottle, then gives it to Maggie]]

MM: I'll get your bottle.

NS: No it's okay Mateo, we got you.

MM: Am I better when I had will... woken up?

NS: You'll be right as rain. Sweet dreams.

MM: *[mumbles]*

[[SFX: Maggie mixes up the cure. Nikhil injects Mateo with a sedative, and he passes out.]]

NS: Ready. How are we doing, Maggie?

ME: Coming through!

SG: God I hope this works.

ME: Alright, administering...

[[SFX: Maggie injects Mateo]]

ME: It's done.

SG: It's done!

NS: He should be awake in about an hour, and then we'll know.

ME: And then, it'll be your turn.

SG: Oh, um... Wow, that looked painful? Do I have to get the shot in the spine? Can I get a lozenge or something haha...

ME: Unfortunately.

SG: Man I did not think that one through.

[[SFX: radio tuning; Maggie and Nikhil chop vegetables in the kitchen.]]

ME: What have you done next?

NS: I have some ideas, about where Mateo and I will go.

ME: Or when you are going?

NS: Do you actually want to know?

ME: I'd suppose not.

NS: Are you... are you going to take the injection? The whole butterfly booster thing?

ME: Still thinking. I'm got used to this by now but... thinking.

NS: But after we all leave, who will–

ME: I figured it out, don't worrying.

[[SFX: Sally enters.]]

SG: Speaking on the level, spinal injections are a son of a gun.

NS: Here you go.

[[SFX: Nikhil hands Sally a pill bottle]]

SG: What are these?

NS: Antibiotics. You just had a foreign object inserted into your backbone in somebody's kitchen, I'd like to avoid you dying of infection.

SG: Y'know, this willy nilly prescription of antibiotics is why we had resistance in my time.

NS: Just swallow the pills, Sally.

[[SFX: Sally swallows the pills.]]

SG: Where's Mateo?

[[SFX: Mateo enters from outside]]

MM: Y'know, they always talk about which came first, the chicken or the egg. You know who I think it was?

NS: Which?

MM: The rooster! *[laughs]*

SG: Ew, gross!

[[SFX: Phone rings in another room.]]

ME: Uh... Excuse me.

[[SFX: Maggie leaves, Nikhil takes up chopping.]]

MM: How're you feeling Sally? Any lingering flutters of Butterfly Syndrome?

SG: Not so far.

NS: Gross fact: it got its name because it causes these lesions on your brain that look like butterflies—

[[SFX: Maggie then reenters.]]

ME: Dr. Sharma... phone for you.

NS: That's... odd.

SG: ...Well, I mean, they already know you're here, right? No harm in picking it up and seeing what they want.

NS: I suppose not. Excuse me, I guess.

[[SFX: Nikhil leaves; Maggie pours the vegetables into a hot pan]]

SG: You know, one time, I tried to cook a whole holiday dinner instantly using a CAGE.

MM: And how did that turn out.

ME: Burning the room down?

SG: It was a warehouse, thank you very much... I had to sprint to the fire extinguisher.

MM: [laughs]

[[SFX: More cooking.]]

SG: So, who do you think Nikhil is talking to? Elbourne, I thought you'd want to avoid a phone line entirely, "Big Brother is listening" and all that?

ME: I haven't had a brother and it was for emergencies only. I'll have a feeling Nikhil's caller believes they have one.

MM: Not to sound like a pompous asshole but isn't everyone Nikhil cares about... here?

SG: *[realizing]* Oh shit.

NS: *[voice rising from the other room]* You're sentencing them to a cruel, senseless death!

MM: LeMartine finally found us?

SG: Possibly worse...

[[SFX: Nikhil slams the phone. Quiet, only the sounds of cooking. Nikhil re-enters.]]

MM: What was that about?

NS: What? Nothing, nothing. Is the food almost done? Smells amazing.

SG: It was Petra, wasn't it. She's still throwing bombs?

NS: ...To put it lightly. Her whole plan.... She was still hoping I'd want to be a part of it but... She had more sense when she was a child!

MM: Did you tell her what we–

NS: Yes, yes, she was having none of it. She's so... fixated, it's impossible to budge her. We may have to move sooner than we planned, Mateo.

SG: About that. I know y'all have some big move planned, and I don't wanna step on any toes, but... without the specter of brain damage hanging over me, I have a lot more room to plan a big move of my own. And I need to get started.

NS: It sounds like you're planning to jump back. Pretty far, I'd wager.

SG: I'm gonna go... where I'm gonna go. But I want you guys to keep doing what you're doing with the archive. Broadcasting this, all of this that's happened. It's way easier on lil ol' me than my tragical mystery tour.

MM: Nikhil... if she's planning a mission that might interfere with ours...

NS: I know. Ripple isolation protocol.

SG: Ripple what?

NS: It means that for the success of both of our missions... we should try to complete them in a fashion that won't negate each other. And since we're only trying to find an Outpost, well... They have Outposts in some pretty remote places.

MM: It means that, for the sake of both of us, this should be the last contact we can ever have with you, Dr. Grissom. I'm sorry.

SG: Well, then I guess this is... You know what? We've said goodbye enough already. This time I just want to say: Good luck.

NS: Good luck, Sally. You might need it.

ME: How sweet. But I'd like to avoid the wrath of Petra as long as humanly possible, and I'm not going into hiding so you all could brought the trouble to me. So, here's what we've done. We finish cooking and then sat down and eat this very nice meal that I will graciously sharing with you all. Once that is finishing, you all can left and scheming elsewhere.

SG: To be fair, I was not intentionally involved in any–

ME: Sally!

SG: Nope, got it, you're right, we eat and then it's back in the great wide world, got it.

MM: Shall I plate the vegetables?

[[SFX: radio tuning; phone line ringing]]

PM: Hey, Duke Snider here. Got an RSVP no on the invite. Really bummed he won't be joining us for the world series. But them's the brakes. Got your message about the foam fingers, gotta get the address to send them to. Relieved the feelers for the hot dog cart paid off.

[[SFX: radio tuning; a laboratory]]

SG: Quantum Dynamics & Mechanics?

ER: It's accurate, but doesn't draw attention.

SG: It's a mouthful, is what it is. And there's no good acronym there. QDAM? I mean, what even is that?

ER: If only you'd been here when we printed the letterhead. Thanks for coming all the way out to meet me.

SG: Of course, Roberts. It's a nice place you've got here.

ER: There's not much here yet. But it's mine. Ours.

SG: Yeah, how is that going?

ER: It's hard, but Birdie and I are making it work.

SG: Hey, that's the spirit! Don't let institutional homophobia get you down.

ER: That's why I built my own institution. Well, am building. Honestly, I've come across a lot more roadblocks being a woman, than a sly one. I've had to get Ted Chambers to talk to half a dozen different contractors for me because God forbid a woman have opinions on manufacturing specifications. Please tell me it was better in the future?

SG: Ehh...

ER: What an exciting century it's going to be.

SG: Hey, my future's been unwritten. We've got a shot. That's why you want a place like this, right?

ER: I see your point, but I don't like the odds.

SG: Me too, Roberts, me too.

ER: I'm worried.

SG: About the future of sexism in the first world?

ER: About Petra.

SG: Oh, yeah. I'm worried too. I ran into Nikhil a few weeks ago. He hasn't seen her, and I guess they're not exactly on great terms.

ER: She's still mad about what we gave up to end hostilities with KTNK.

SG: Of course she is. What happened to her was barbaric, and you empowered more people to do the exact same thing. Honestly, she'd be as mad if you gave it to the Soviets as she would if you gave it to General Electric.

ER: I know, but she doesn't understand the pressure I was under! There were extenuating cir... you know what, I'm not going to do this. She's mad, it's my fault. I can't help that.

SG: I'm proud of you. That's growth.

ER: I've heard things. Whispers through the grapevine. I think she's planning something big.

SG: Big? There's only one of her. How big could it be?

ER: And one Petra becomes two, who become four, who become sixteen. There are more of her. And they're angry. She's been sighted in Point-of-Exile, Huntsville AL, and Murmansk.

SG: What is she doing?

ER: Huntsville is where the Army's ballistic missile program is located, Murmansk is the city where KTNK was building the first usable WELT.

SG: Well, fuck!

ER: That's about what I said.

SG: I've got to find her and talk to her. One of her, at least. She's going to take this way too far!

ER: I recommend you don't. The last time we spoke, it was with a gun in my face.

SG: She's not going to stop otherwise.

ER: I agree, but I don't think you'll help much. She's not too fond of you, either.

SG: Well, you're not wrong there.

ER: She's going to do something bad, and there's going to be fallout. But I want to be ready for it. And I want you there to build that with me.

SG: What, you wanna bid on rebuilding DC after she flattens it?

ER: I'm not trying to profit from misery here, Sally. But you could do good here. With me.

SG: That's not my path, and I don't want to disappear into an organization again. Not here. Not like this.

ER: What'll you do, then?

SG: Well... once I've recovered all the way... I'm going to do the one thing you can't.

ER: And what is that?

[[SFX: radio tuning; phone line ringing]]

PM: Pee-Wee here... ugh dropping the code names. It's Petra prime and I'm at the facility. Thanks team, for everything that you've done. I know that's... well it's basically self-congratulatory but I mean it! We really pushed the boundaries of what we could do, what our brains could handle. The rocket, the WELT, the Timepieces. A ton of coordination. I'm proud of us. I know this voicemail doesn't mean much considering as soon as I push the metaphorical "big red button," everything changes for you but... thank you. Anyway. For everything. You all made strapping a time-bomb to a rocket look easy. Adios mother-fuckers.

[[SFX: Timepiece; radio tuning]]

SG: This is the audio diary of Dr. Sally Grissom. They tell me the date is October 29th, 1943. But the weird part is.... I don't think it's the history I came from.

[[SFX: tape recorder stops]]

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ars PARADOXICA was created by Daniel Manning & Mischa Stanton. Season 3 was also written by Eli Barraza, Julian Mundy, Danielle Shemaiah & Tau Zaman.
Episode 34: Path features -

Kristen DiMercurio (Sally Grissom)
Katie Speed (Esther Roberts)
Lia Peros (Petra Marquez)
L. Jeffrey Moore (Lou Gaines)
Zach Ehrlich (Jack Wyatt)
Lauren Shippen (Maggie Elbourne)
Arjun Gupta (Nikhil Sharma)
Bernardo Cubria (Mateo Morales)
Eric Silver, Michael Fisché, Brandon Grugle (additional voices)
with special thanks to Isabel Atkinson.

Original music by Mischa Stanton and by Eno Freedman-Brodmann.

ars PARADOXICA is brought to you by Hims, ZipRecruiter, and The Internet: Ew, man, ugh. Gross.

16 15 15 22 11 07 04 20 18 26 03 12 21 15 04 16 12 13 04 21
14 09 06 06 09 25 11 03 14 15 11 06
WEATHER IN MEMPHIS: banjoes

35: Tangent

WRITTEN BY DANIEL MANNING, MISCHA STANTON & ELI BARRAZA
DIRECTED & SOUND DESIGN BY MISCHA STANTON

MISCHA (M): These may be our final few episodes, but we've got plenty more projects in store. To see what we're doing next, follow us on Twitter @TheWhisperforge.

[Ad music]

M: Before we start today, we want to tell you about Join The Party. Join the Party is an audio drama podcast told through collaborative storytelling and roleplaying, built on the 5th edition of Dungeons & Dragons. That means they create a story that everyone from seasoned players to true beginners can enjoy. Where else can you get adventure, intrigue, queer teens, talking gargoyles and lots of high fives all in one place?

And after each episode, hosts Eric, Amanda, Mike & Brandon sit down for the Afterparty, a talkback session where they break down the game and answer your questions about how to play at home. It's a party, and you're invited.

Check them out at JointhePartyPod.com, on Twitter & Tumblr @JoinThePartyPod, or on Apple Podcasts or wherever fine audio content is available.

[Previously, in a few of the many aborted timelines of *ars Paradoxica]*

ER: It's irresponsible to abandon the Timepiece presentation like this! We just don't have the time!

JW: Where are we going, anyway?

AP: Las Vegas, Nevada. A couple days of card games and drinking will do you all a world of good.

SG: "Return this to the mail slot for "SYLVIA PUREBOOT" by 3pm tomorrow." Who the hell is Sylvia Pureboot?

VL: Rainbow's supposed to bend light, you know? We thought, if you could bend the light that goes around the ship, you would make it disappear from view, right? But Ivan and I bit off more than we could chew, trying to capture and store every photon in a given area.

PM: It's Petra prime and I'm at the facility. I know this voicemail doesn't mean much considering as soon as I push the metaphorical "big red button," everything changes for you but... thank you anyway. You all made strapping a time-bomb to a rocket look easy.

[Theme music]

[[SFX: tape recorder starts; Sally messes with the microphone]]

SALLY GRISSOM (SG): Hello? Test... testing, one two. Okay, they came through I guess. Goddamn, this recorder is huge though. Uh, hi, this is the audio diary of Dr. Sally Grissom. They tell me the date is October 29th, 1943. And by all the usual accounts–newspaper datelines, calendars, radio, what have you–that seems to be true. But the weird part is... and I'm still trying to wrap my head around it myself, so sorry if I don't sound sure... I don't think it's the history I came from. I think I'm in a parallel universe. Or, alternate timeline. Or something.

Yesterday, for me, was August 14th, 20[redacted]. I was working on a particle physics experiment at the Superconducting Super Collider in Texas, and I got caught in the middle of it. And I passed out, and when I came to (give or take the contents of my breakfast across a cold wet metal floor), I was on the deck of the USS Eldridge, a destroyer escort that was anchored off the shore of the Philadelphia Naval Shipyard. And it's 1943. And I... Sorry, I know that's probably not weird to you, but it very much is for me.

It was some kind of military experiment. Somehow, whatever they were doing and whatever I was doing in 20[redacted] combined into... I don't know what. Time travel? Or parallel-universe-hopping? Or both, or neither? Like I said, I'm still working on it.

Here's my biggest piece of evidence for parallel: When I came to from being just... God, just super sick everywhere... yeesh. But when I came to, they brought me in to see this guy, Bill Donovan. Big ol' 40s brutish type, big frame, square jaw, hair slicked back to an inch of its life. And he interrogated me. He asked about how I got there, about my experiment, about where I was from... And then he asked me about, what sounded like an artificial satellite orbiting the Earth? With a salvo of missiles all trained on that little ship, in the Philadelphia harbor? And what I knew about this mysterious woman who appeared out of nowhere to bring it to their attention.

I said to him, "My name is Dr. Sally Grissom, and I think I may have accidentally invented time-travel." And he just looked at me and said, "Ma'am, that may be only the second most exciting thing that's happened today."

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

CBS REPORTER: World News Today, brought to you by Continental Radio & Television Corporation, makers of Admiral Radio, "America's Smart Set." By shortwave broadcast, direct from important overseas stations as well as leading news centers of our own country, CBS correspondents are waiting to give you a complete report from the world's political and battlefront.

But first, our top story tonight: As our war-weary nation turns to what's next in the aftermath of the treaties signed in Europe, the National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics looks to the stars with their new satellite technology, announcing today in an official statement that the artificial satellite that orbits our planet is but the first phase of a plan which promises, before the decade is out, to put an American into outer space. Congress' appropriations bill seems to be a vote of confidence in NACA after a spirited speech from a lead mathematician on the project, Anthony Partridge.

[[SFX: radio tuning; a casino showroom; a big band plays live music in the background]]

SCIENTIST: And they're the ones asking *us* if it's safe? I'll put down five bucks says the whole Southwest goes up in flames...

SG: *[in background]* Hey, could I get a sidecar, a dry martini, a French 75, two scotch with bitters, and a 7 & 7?

BARTENDER: Coming right up.

SCIENTIST: ...And I might as well put another two on the whole thing not even working which would be just perfect given all the press they've invited. By now, I'm not even sure that—

SG: That's a fancy recorder you've got there!

SCIENTIST: Yeah, it's... top of the line.

SG: Use it for dictation often?

SCIENTIST: Work stuff, yes. Excuse me—

SG: What do you do?

SCIENTIST: I'm a physicist. You a reporter?

SG: Oh god no, I'm a physicist too! You here for the demonstration?

SCIENTIST: I'm the one demonstrating. I... can't really talk about it til tomorrow.

SG: No, I get it. I'm here with my team on invitation to see it.

SCIENTIST: Hope you enjoy the show.

[[SFX: He lifts his glass in a mock toast.]]

SG: How do you feel about it?

SCIENTIST: Well, I'm on whiskey number...

[[SFX: glasses clinking]]

SCIENTIST: That many.

SG: That bad, huh?

SCIENTIST: Sitting on a wobbly stool waiting for the end of days.

SG: I know how you feel.

SCIENTIST: I very much doubt it. I've seen the end coming. I know what happens when the primordial energies of the universe collapse on themselves. I know there won't be any escape. And the thing is, that end? They just made it as a distraction! A distraction from whatever reason the goddamn NACA accelerated their program.

SG: That whiskey have bitters or is it just you?

SCIENTIST: I've gone to the brink of what science can do, all in the name of some superweapon without a war to fight it with. It's just a goddamn pony-trick so the public thinks the worst thing imaginable is on the ground and not in the sky.

SG: What, you think the moonmen tag-teamed with aliens from Mars to put a spaceship in our orbit and Uncle Sam is gonna distract everyone with a giant bomb?...Shit dude, that's heavy.

SCIENTIST: Yesterday the best we could do to defy gravity was fly airplanes that go "pew pew." Today we're blasting off the ground with rockets. Things developing that fast? Something's up there.

SG: And you're not sure if we're ready to handle it. Any of it. Not what's up there, not the tech that's gonna come out of it, not the knowledge, the power to take the fundamentals of the universe like toys in your hands. Morals and ethics playing a losing game of catch-up and you wish you could go back to working in theory, to writing equations in notebooks. That about sum it up?

SCIENTIST: ...Who are you?

SG: You're Los Alamos, right? I'm from Polvo. Couple hours south of you. I'm doing the same kind of stuff you're doing, but with ODAR.

SCIENTIST: ODAR? Haven't heard of it.

SG: Got a feeling it's probably better for you in the long run.

SCIENTIST: I'm not counting on the long run lately. So I'm drinking. Drinking until I'm flat on my back, or the world ends. Whichever comes first.

SG: Which one does come first?

SCIENTIST: Guess we'll see tomorrow. I'll be the man having whiskey sweats behind the
podium. If I even decide to get out of bed.

SG: Wish I could tell you it's all for the best but my gift of foresight has been seriously spotty lately.

[[SFX: glasses clinking]]

BARTENDER: Here ya go, sweetheart.

SG: That's my stop.

SCIENTIST: Enjoy your drinks, for however long you've got.

SG: Take care.

[[SFX: Sally walks away with her tray of drinks]]

SG: Where'd they go? Guys? Roberts, Wyatt? Pur– Oh, Pureboot, there you are. Where'd everybody go?

PETRA MARQUEZ (PM): Saw them getting escorted out on my way back from the bathroom. Casino probably didn't appreciate our after-dinner chat. Ask me, I blame Jack, the man's voice carries.

[[SFX: Petra grabs her drink and downs it.]]

PM: What? Don't want a perfectly good drink to go to waste because of some loudmouths.

SG: You are way more hardcore than I ever gave you credit for!

[[SFX: radio tuning; the Polvo lab, breakroom; Sally throws down her hand of cards]]

SG: Nope, I'm sorry, you lost me again.

ESTHER ROBERTS (ER): What are you not getting? The rules are simple. You're trying to build a run of cards in each of your piles before the center deck flips–

SG: Ok wait, ok yeah. So when you divide them this way, you get double points, right?

ER: Not quite, that's only in the third round. We haven't gotten there yet.

JACK WYATT (JW): And wait until we get to the third round...

PM: Hmm... Hmm... Okay. Like that.

ER: ... Well damn, would you look at that? Sylvia ran the river. You sure you've never played this before?

PM: It just wasn't that hard to pick up!

SG: Okay, you know what Pureboot, we're not all weird savants like you, not all of our brains can so easily assimilate such an outlandish number of rules that double-back on each other every frickin' which way–

PM: Better pick it up quick, Grissom. Before the Floating Tin Can launches missiles and we're all turned to dust.

JW: Jesus, Sylvia, there's a cheery thought for a friendly game of cards.

PM: What? I'm just saying, if you can't take the heat, get out of the dang kitchen.

SG: Fair enough, but... But I'll tell you what, it's been two years, and nary a peep from that thing. The way I see it, every day we're still here is an opportunity to learn and do better.

ER: That's really nice, Dr. Grissom.

PM: Hmmph.

JW: Yes yes, we're all gonna die. Shuffle up and deal again, I feel like I'm starting to get the hang of this.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

SG: I would have thought that two years living in Polvo would have left me jaded. That nothing could surprise me anymore. But then, I get this letter from my aunt Margie. For the folks playing at home, this makes no sense since I don't have an aunt Margie, and I certainly don't have an aunt Bernice who lives in 1945, because I don't exist in 1945. Technically. I mean I do now but, you know... not long enough to have an aunt. But since my nonexistence is so top secret, the people combing our mail for signs of espionage don't know that and let this allegedly innocuous bit of paper through. But, it's not innocuous. It's a code. Took me a little while to crack but essentially it said "92145 BARLOWE DIES IN LAB FROM MAGIC BULLET." Sounds more like an answer to a game of Clue right? But then, there was this moment when Pureboot and I were trying to fix one of the superconducting– dammit. I didn't do the intro thing, did I? I'm just gonna start over. Diary of Sally Grissom, September 21, 1945...

[[SFX: radio tuning; the Polvo lab; Sally working underneath the Timepiece; Petra's watch ticks]]

SG: —So Donovan says to me, he says, "Rock music gives me a headache. You're going to go deaf with that claptrap!" But who cares about your

hearing, y'know? You want to feel the music– hand me those pliers, would you?

PM: Here. Hold on, I'm gonna grab a coffee, want one?

SG: *[ignoring her]* So I tell him, it's about letting it drown everything out, letting that inner animal take hold of you...

PM: Whatever...

[[SFX: Petra leaves. A bullet appears through time and ricochets off the Timepiece.]]

SG: Pureboot?

[[SFX: Sally hits her head on the Timepiece.]]

SG: *[to her diary]* Not my best Doc Brown moment considering those numbers were clearly the date but here we are. September 21st, 1945, someone by the name of Barlowe died in the lab by a magic bullet. Maybe this mystery person meant a time travelling bullet? Letters are at a premium when it comes to code. Anyway, no idea who Barlowe was or who they were supposed to be. Wherever they are, I hope they're alive and well.

[[SFX: radio tuning; night in the desert; Petra knocks on Esther's door]]

ER: Oh, hey Sylvia. Whaaat's that bottle?

PM: Oh this? Absinthe. Well... Moonshine colored green, but don't tell Jack.

ER: Okay. Gimme a minute, just need to grab my coat.

[[SFX: Esther steps inside to grab her coat from the closet; Petra retrieves a letter from her pocket]]

PM: Brought you this, think it got mixed in with my mail, though how they read Roberts as Pureboot is beyond me.

ER: We don't even live near each other.

PM: *[suspiciously]* I know, so weird!

ER: ...Thanks.

[[SFX: Esther tosses the letter downs inside]]

PM: Aren't you gonna open it?

ER: Maybe later, we should really get going.

[[SFX: She shuts the door and locks it. They walk.]]

PM: So, who is she?

ER: Who?

PM: The correspondent. Nice handwriting, figured it was a woman.

ER: Oh, it's from, um, it's from my sister. Miriam.

PM: That's nice of her.

ER: Sure.

PM: Bad blood, huh?

ER: We don't talk much.

PM: Really? Because I just dropped off a letter from her. Seems like you're the one whose not doing the talking.

ER: I thought we were going to a party, not an interrogation.

PM: Sorry, I'm sorry. It's not my place it's just... I hate to see two sisters drift apart because one of them isn't willing to talk to the other. That's all.

ER: Do you have a sister, Sylvia? I don't know much about your family.

PM: No, yes. I mean, I did but... she's gone now so. You know.

ER: Oh, I'm... I'm so sorry.

PM: Yeah, well, it is what it is, que sera sera or whatever.

ER: No, Sylvia, I mean it. I'm sorry. I know I don't talk to Miriam as much as I should but... she means the world to me and to think.... I'm really sorry.

PM: Thanks, Esther. That actually means a lot.

[[SFX: Thunder in the distance; radio tuning; Sally sits in RAINBOW Station B with Ivan Maraczek.]]

SG: So, Mr. Maraczek, where are you thinking of heading to after all this?

IVAN MARACZEK (IM): I do not know.

SG: I hear NACA is doing cool work. Didn't the guy I replaced move over there? What's his name, Partridge or whatever? You already have an in! You could, like, make ways to charge satellites in orbit or whatever.

IM: We're nowhere near Florida–

[[SFX: Walkie talkie crackles.]]

JW: *[on walkie]* Jack to Sally, over.

SG: Wyatt my man! How's it hanging?

JW: No sign of lightning or Lambert.

SG: Lightning Lambert, that's a good boxing nickname!

JW: Can I please leave and go to the party? No offense to your anonymous tip but Sylvia mentioned she was sneaking in absinthe.

SG: Wyatt, what time is it?

JW: 10:03.

SG: Well okay then. Pull the lever, Kronk!

JW: This might cause a power outage–

SG: Just pull the goddamn lever!

JW: Oh my god, here we go. [pause] Okay, I pulled it. And who is–AAAH!

[[SFX: Lightning strikes RAINBOW station A, heard through the radio and in the distance from Sally's end.]]

SG: Boom! That's how it's done!

JW: Alright, fine, you were right. I'll keep an eye out for Lambert and a pipe or whatever you said he allegedly hits me with.

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

SG: Diary of Sally Grissom, Febraury 8th, 1946. Settling in pretty nicely here in... jeez, I really can't believe this town is named "Point-of-Exile." Sounds fake, but ok I guess. Wyatt and Pureboot are being moved into their new apartments now. Was a little surprised Donovan didn't make the trip with us. Surprised, but not disappointed. Ding dong, the ding dong's dead. Even more surprising: they put Roberts in charge. Can you believe it? Roberts. My subordinate. Is now my boss! How rude.

Hah, I'm just kidding. I probably wouldn't have taken the gig anyway. Trying to figure out what ODAR's gonna do now that the war is over? Trying to figure out all the time-travel logistics singlehandedly, with NACA biting at our heels to get to the satellite first? Yeah, no thanks. I'll stay in the lab.

[[SFX: radio tuning; Amelia opens the door on an empty office]]

AMELIA ARNAULT (AA): Through here, mum.

ER: Uh, yes! Great. Thank you Amelia.

AA: I'll be just through here if you need anything.

[[SFX: Amelia closes the door; Esther sighs, puts her box of things down on her desk. A note appears through time.]]

ER: What the... "Greetings from your neighbors to the east, we thank you on your alternate's behalf, enjoy your new position, we hope you live up to her potential. Karla." [sigh] The first cryptic time-note of many to come, I'm sure.

[[SFX: Esther crumples the note, throws it away; radio tuning; the diner]]

ER: Miriam, can you pass the salt please?

MIRIAM ROBERTS (MR): Oh yeah, I would *love* to.

SG: ...I wouldn't do that.

ER: What? Pass the salt?

SG: ...I definitely saw Pureboot swap it for the sugar while Beta Roberts kept watch.

PM: Sally!

ER: What? Come on you guys...

PM: The point of a prank is that you don't spill the beans on a co-conspirator!

SG: I'm sorry, I never consented to being a part of your plan!

ER: Glad to know you feel comfortable pranking your superior.

MR: I felt comfortable pranking my sister for my last breakfast in town!

[[SFX: Jack gags]]

JW: Sally, did you have to wait to say something until after I had sugared my potatoes?

[[SFX: The gang laughs at Jack's face; radio tuning]]

SG: Diary of Sally Grissom, December 25th, 1946. You know, last night I was really feeling the Yuletide spirit, Esther digging up that predictive mechanics algorithm to implement with the processors inside the zero-time bubble: it was like Christmas came a day early! Apparently they were working on the algorithm before I showed up in '43 but when, what's his name, Anthony... Patreon? Whatever, their old boss got fired and went to the NACA, they kind of threw everything away to focus on the Timepiece. But now that Roberts is in charge, she's ordered Pureboot to lead a team to go through old archives

for anything useful and now we can get instantaneous calculations! Does this amount to anything? No, not really, but I have a THEORY that–

[[SFX: CAGE activates.]]

SALLY GRISSOM FROM THIS EPISODE (SG-A): Oh shit, what the...OHMYGOD–

SALLY GRISSOM PRIME (SG-P): Calm down, Sally, you're gonna be fine this time but I need you to lie down here.

[[SFX: Sally-Prime pats a gurney]]

SG-A: Oh... You're...

SG-P: Yep.

SG-A: But you're—

SG-P: Yes.

SG-A: You're me from the future!

SG-P: *[sigh]* Okay, let's get this out of the way. Yes, hi, I'm you. From the future. You're thinking of the number 86, you're gonna hold your middle finger behind your back, the password is Nitric Caiman Grout.

SG-A: ...Why 86?

SG-P: It's what we always pick. Woah is it weird to be on the other side of this.

SG-A: Well isn't that just... wizard.

SG-P: Enough time-horsing around. I gotta give you this injection so your brain doesn't turn to mush after this conversation. Only thing stopping it now is this CAGE.

[[SFX: Sally opens a bag and starts preparing a syringe]]

SG-A: That is a horrifyingly big needle and wait, what, why would my brain turn to mush?

SG-P: Cliffsnotes: time travel paradoxes are bad for your head. They make you go crazy. The literature doesn't exist for you yet, but it'll be called "Butterfly Syndrome." Woah, deja vu, last time I went through this is really coming back to me now. Anyway, seriously, get on the gurney.

SG-A: Oh!... Ok!

[[SFX: radio tuning; back in Sally's house, outside the CAGE]]

SG-A: Goddamn, spinal injections...

SG-P: I know, right?

SG-A: So we're just gonna hang...

SG-P: Until you feel better, yep.

SG-A: What happened the last time, when you were me?

SG-P: Uh, basically the same rigamarole except I ended up losing three years for CAGE therapy. We didn't have this handy dandy cure at the time.

SG-A: What was so desperately important that the other future us would risk brain damage?

SG-P: Like I said, I lost most of that conversation. When I was finally back to my normal self all I could remember was something about pumpkins? But now that it's all coming back to me I'm pretty sure she, I... you... we, were talking about the pumpkin *papers*. Yeah, and those ended up being documents exposing Soviet spies in the US–... oh my fucking god I bet Hank Cornish's name was all over those papers! Huh. Wow, that would have saved us all a HUGE headache, damn.

SG-A: So is that something I still need to look out for? Pumpkin papers? Hank... what did you say his name was?

SG-P: If you haven't heard of him by now it's probably not anything you need to worry about. I'm pretty sure it's gonna be different this time around.

SG-A: So then, why did you travel back from whenever you were from, to talk to me in person?

SG-P: Back in my time there was this kid, Petra. She was immune to Butterfly Syndrome, can make time-duplicates of herself, and had a bone to pick with the US Government and ODAR–for fairly valid reasons. So she sent a giant space superweapon called the WELT–

SG-A: The WELT?

SG-P: Weaponized Entropy for Large Targets.

SG-A: Hah! Sounds like one of ours.

SG-P: It is. Can I finish my story here?

SG-A: Sorry, sorry, go on.

SG-P: Thank you. So Petra sends the WELT back in time to the original anchor point, and as far as I can tell she's been having a jolly good time getting her rocks off watching the world freak out about it.

SG-A: THAT'S why the NACA has been so weird!

SG-P: Exactly.

SG-A: So, what does it do?

SG-P: Are y'all up to CAGEs yet?

SG-A: Yeah, we've got CAGEs. Still trying to figure out what they're useful for–

SG-P: Imagine a gigantic CAGE, big enough to cover huge populated areas. Missiles spread the array generators out over the border of the area and then activate, leaving an entire population cut off from the rest of the universe, no deactivator, no supplies, no running water, and then you let the CAGE internal clock run until... Until the whole place ages to dust.

SG-A: Holy fuck.

SG-P: You said it, sis. But, I managed to travel back as well to figure out a way to stop her. Even managed to save your butt a couple of times.

SG-A: ...YOU'RE Aunt Margie??

SG-P: Mm-hmm, figured I could help... guide you along the way. Time travelling Fairy Godmother kind of thing.

SG-A: ...But like most of the stuff you warned about didn't come true.

SG-P: Yeah, with Partridge off at the NACA and Barlowe who knows where in time, I haven't been able to be my usual precognitive self–OH! Right, the big thing I needed to tell you!

SG-A: Bigger than a city killing superweapon straight out of a comic book?

SG-P: On a personal level, yeah. Oh hey, go me for putting personal things ahead of science things, I think this is what they call progress. ANYWAY you know your lab partner? Sylvia Pureboot?

SG-A: Yeah, she's pretty fantastic, why?

SG-P: Oh man, I wish you hadn't said that... I, uh...

SG-A: She's a double agent, right? Working for this, Petra kid?

SG-P: Worse: she is Petra. Or, one of them. She's the one behind all of this.

SG-A: So.... wait. She–

SG-P: Yep.

SG-A: This whole time–

SG-P: Yeah.

SG-A: But I thought–

SG-P: 'Fraid not.

SG-A: ....Motherfucker!

[[SFX: radio tuning]]

JW: I still can't get over that there are two of you.

SG-P: You think that's impressive, wait 'till you meet the Legion of Petras.

JW: So, wait okay, this Petra girl is actually responsible for the Big Tin Can that appeared the day you did, and she wants to use it to destroy ODAR or DC or what have you?

ER: How come she hates *me* more than anybody?

SG-P: She hates a version that you could have become in a different timeline.

ER: My head hurts.

SG-A: I'm actually doing fine.

SG-P: Roberts, tell me if your headache gets any worse. Listen, Wyatt, Roberts, Grissom and I need your–

SG-A Uh, DOCTOR Grissom!

SG-P: Oh my... I am.... I am so sorry. DOCTOR Grissom and I need your help. Can you do it?

JW: This is bonkers, I'm in.

ER: Of course.

SG-P: Okay, so I've got a plan to deal with Petra. But first, let's make sure nobody's listening.

ER: No, no please, those are expen–

[[SFX: Sally pulls out a microphone and breaks it; static; tape recorder stops]]

Zaman.
Episode 35: Tangent features -

Kristen DiMercurio (Sally Grissom)
Katie Speed (Esther Roberts)
Lia Peros (Petra Marquez)
Zach Ehrlich (Jack Wyatt)
Julian Mundy (Ivan Maraczek)
Sammi Lappin (Miriam Roberts)
Isabel Atkinson (Amelia Arnault)
Rob McCollum, Barry Stanton, Zach Valenti (additional voices)

Original music by Mischa Stanton and by Eno Freedman-Brodmann.

ars PARADOXICA is brought to you by The Internet: It's highly addictive!

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23 22 23 08 21 16 13 24 23 07 01 22 02 13 23 05 06 23 15 14
26 21 26 08 03 11 26 17 06 12 23
WEATHER IN TULSA: s p o o k y

36: Release

WRITTEN BY DANIEL MANNING, MISCHA STANTON, ELI BARRAZA & TAU ZAMAN
DIRECTED & SOUND DESIGN BY MISCHA STANTON

MISCHA (M): A quick warning: This episode contains graphic depictions of gun violence. Listener discretion advised.

[Ad music]

M: Hiring is challenging. It's hard to find qualified candidates in the right era. And even with a Timepiece, it takes forever. But there's one place you can go where hiring is simple, fast and smart. A place where growing businesses connect to qualified candidates. That place is ZipRecruiter.com/ARS.

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ZipRecruiter: The smartest way to hire.

[Previously, on *ars PARADOXICA*]

SG: My name is Sally Grissom and I think I accidentally invented time travel.

BD: Win the war for us, then we'll talk.

SG: I don't wanna pull anyone away from anything that was going to have an impact on my history.

AP: but… We're a Tier 1 project. Hell, we are the Tier 1 Project!

ER: I--I'm just not sure why I'm being brought onto this team? I'm just a lowly calculator. You could've gotten engineers worth twice my weight.

SG: ...Oh man, was dying the most interesting thing Quentin Barlowe ever did?

JB: It doesn't matter what you say, because you're going to make this right.

SG: Listen–what happened is what's happened. How can you live when the past is just as uncertain as the future!

JB: You've built this thing that promises to fix what once was broken, and you just let it sit there? Too afraid to do anything with that power, because you're afraid that one day you might regret it?

[[SFX: Anthony chokes Bill.]]

CW: Oh Anthony. Anthony! What have you done?

CW: you made your choice. And with choice comes consequence.

HC: You're going to become the bedrock for everything you've worked for at ODAR.You can be the genius that saves the world.

AP: ...I'm listening.

AP: This room is my prison. My cage. I'm not being dramatic, either: it's really called a CAGE. Controlled Atemporal something or other. A little bubble in time isolated to a single moment, tethered to the deck of the USS Eldridge on the afternoon of October 28, 1943. This place, right here, right now is the nexus that makes time travel possible. Yes, I'm a time travel mailman. How glamorous.

AMELIA: Miss Roberts, you're needed in the atrium. The children are here.

CW: … Children?

PM: You know what I mean! What kid should be made to watch their friends, their family die over and over again? What kid should give up their goddamn birthday? All so, what? So ODAR could have agents without brain damage?

SG: You left someone to came all the way back here?

NS: There's...another field agent back in ODAR headquarters. I only really started getting to know him just before getting sent back here, though.

MM: When I went back, I ran into someone who wanted a put a stop to this. I mean all of it. Wanted to shut ODAR down for good.

NS: Schematics?

MM: For an anchor point. A second one, separate from the Eldridge.

NS: Who... who gave you this idea?

MM: A lot of people actually. Across time. They've collectively been trying to design something to take down ODAR. Across decades, without ever even meeting each other, sometimes.

NS: "I see the beacons, dotting the arc of time, lighting the way to dawn."

SG: So! Since the last time I checked in, I've started working with a group of radicals looking to subvert a top secret division of the United States government.

MM: What if the beacons June was talking about… are numbers stations? Like the one they used to use in the old days — codes over the airwaves!

SG: Hey guys...

CW: Evening, everyone.

LG: So Mr. Whickman. Now that you've got us right where you've wanted us this whole time, what is it that you want?

CW: I want us to have a little talk about your future.

LG: You want me to join ODAR? After all this?

CW: Take the job. Work for ODAR like you've always wanted to.

SG: In the three years after that, I formally rejoined ODAR, which is kind of a big deal. They're looking into Carmen and Petra and the rest of the Plasticity kids, and precisely where it ranks on a scale between "double parking" and "double genocide."

SG: What the–

[[SFX: Someone throws a bag over Sally's head and binds her; she struggles]]

SOVIET AGENT: [RU] Give her the serum!

TLM: We have reason to believe that Doctor Sally Grissom is now in the custody of a foreign power.

SG: *[tired, miserable]* What do you want?

AD: To end the fighting, as quick as possible. To return to a world not constantly threatening to destroy itself. What is silence worth, Doctor Grissom? What is inaction worth?

SG: I thought I was fixing little things. Y'know, like a lens facing the wrong way... But I... I had no idea what they were building!

TLM: ...A missile array outfitted with CAGE emitters, working in concert to cover entire cities and age them into dust.

ER: Sally's been calling it "Weaponized Entropy for Large Targets," or WELT.

SG: ...I'll be leaving Point-of-Exile by the end of the month.

ME: You need the cure for Butterfly Syndrome.

[[SFX: They pull out files and start leafing through]]

NS: This is incredible! Is this how you cure it?

ME: I can only assume. It's not my work. At least, not yet.

[[SFX: Mateo pops into existence, and Nikhil and Sally catch him.]]

SG: Okay... here we go...

MM: *[dazed, shaking]* Hey there... hot... stuff...

SG: Oh, um... Wow, that looked painful? Do I have to get the shot in the spine?

ME: Unfortunately.

NS: It sounds like you're planning to jump back. Pretty far, I'd wager.

SG: I'm gonna go... where I'm gonna go. But I want you guys to keep doing what you're doing with the archive. Broadcasting this, all of this that's happened.

AP: So you are listening to the archive–just about every single tape that's crossed my desk from 1943 to 1993. I've got discarded pasts, unrealized futures, and messy presents.

NS: And since we're only trying to find an Outpost...

MM: It means, for the sake of both of us, this should be the last contact we can ever have with you, Dr. Grissom. I'm sorry.

SG: ...We've said goodbye enough already. This time I just want to say: Good luck.

ER: I'm worried… About Petra. I think she's planning something big.

PM: It's Petra prime and I'm at the facility. Thanks team, for everything that you've done. ...We really pushed the boundaries of what we could do… The rocket, the WELT, the Timepieces… I'm proud of us.

SG: They tell me the date is October 29th, 1943. But the weird part is... I think I'm in a parallel universe. Or, alternate timeline. Or something.He

asked me about, what sounded like an artificial satellite orbiting the Earth? With a salvo of missiles all trained on that little ship, in the Philadelphia harbor?

SCIENTIST: They just made it as a distraction! It's just a goddamn pony-trick so the public thinks the worst thing imaginable is on the ground and not in the sky.

SG-A: Oh shit, what the...OHMYGOD–

SG-P: Calm down, Sally, you're gonna be fine this time but I need you to lie down here.

SG-A: You're me from the future!

SG-P: Back in my time there was this kid, Petra. She was immune to Butterfly Syndrome, can make time-duplicates of herself, and had a bone to pick with the US Government and ODAR–for fairly valid reasons. So Petra sends the WELT back in time to the original anchor point, and as far as I can tell she's been having a jolly good time getting her rocks off watching the world freak out about it.

SG-A: THAT'S why the NACA has been so weird!

SG-P: ANYWAY you know your lab partner? Sylvia Pureboot?

SG-A: Let me guess. She's a double agent, right? Working for this, Petra kid?

SG-P: Worse: she is Petra.

SG-P: DOCTOR Grissom and I need your help. Can you do it?

JW: This is bonkers, I'm in.

ER: Of course.

SG-P: ...Okay.

[Theme music]

[[SFX: tape recorder starts. Outside, Mateo climbs a ladder and opens a metal hatch; he clambors inside to escape the cold wind.]]

MATEO MORALES (MM): Hoooooomygod. It's cold.

NIKHIL SHARMA (NS): I just got the space heater running, give it a minute.

MM: Can you just crank it to max?

NS: No, that would be a waste of energy! Put on another sweater!

[[SFX: Nikhil boots up a computer, starts typing]]

MM: Awww, look at us, all alone in the middle of a freezing nowhere, and we're bickering already.

NS: In a Beacon of our very own.

MM: June Barlowe would be proud. Stocked with blankets, movies, and snacks to our hearts' content. Real romantic.

[[SFX: Nikhil picks up a notebook, flips through]]

NS: Yeah, and look at these! "IN A GEOPOLITICAL OCEAN." "SALLY CAN YOU HEAR ME." Why, why did you have to make these so damn hard to solve?!

MM: Hey, I didn't know what kinda interference we were gonna have! Plus, it was cute imagining you wracking your brain.

NS: Shut up...

MM: You like it.

[[SFX: They laugh; radio tuning; the ODAR workshop]]

PETRA MARQUEZ/SYLVIA PUREBOOT (PM-A): Got your message, Esther said you needed help to run an experiment?

ALTERNATE SALLY GRISSOM (SG-A): Yeah, okay, stand there.

[[SFX: Sally-A flipping switches; a machine spools up]]

PM-A: What is happening?

SG-A: It's perfectly safe, Pureboot. Geez, think I'd put my lab assistants in harm's way?

PM-A: We both already know the answer to that.

SG-A: Okay in five, four, three, two…

[[SFX: Sally runs over to Petra as the machine powers up. The CAGE bubble forms.]]

PM-A: *[feigning innorance]* Um, Sally? What's happening? Where are we?

SG-A: A CAGE. You and I need to talk… Petra Marquez.

PM-A: ... I can't jump out. Clever.

SG-A: I have my moments.

PM-A: So, how is dear old Sally? She's the one who told you about me, right?

SG-A: I could ask the same of the other Petra. Petras. Petrae? How many of you are there?

PM-A: Oh, you know, just me. Been really busy lately. It's like I've gotta be in three places at once!

SG-A: Okay let me think, you'd need enough to either build or steal a rocket that could launch a satellite into space; steal a timepiece to send that satellite back in time; plus one, you, to go undercover to early ODAR to make sure none of us ever thought to look too closely at NACA. So… anywhere between three and a fuckload. Are you the first Petra? OG Petra? Petra Prime? Petra_test_06_finaldraft1?

PM-A: Surprised that you're not drooling on the floor. Thought your puny human brains couldn't handle that.

SG-A: I taught myself a thing or two.

PM-A: *[sigh]* How do you expect this conversation to end, Sally?

SG-A: I… honestly have no idea. I don't really even know who you are.

PM-A: It's funny, I… Petra… kind of hated you. Hated her: the older Sally, who told you who I am. And after spending a few years as Sylvia Pureboot… I liked being Sylvia more than I liked being Petra. Someone with a decent brain and a good heart, who gets to work on this new frontier with someone she admires. You know, Sylvia started to like you. A lot. But, I'm not Sylvia Pureboot. And you're not the Sally I knew.

SG-A: Where does that leave us?

PM-A: You let me go and I swear on the Pureboot name I won't tell… Petra-Prime or any of the others that you know or suspect anything.

SG-A: And I'm just supposed to trust the word of someone who has lied to me about who she was for years? Hard pass.

PM-A: You know, another version of me would probably just kill you right now.

SG-A: If you were thinking that brutal honesty would help, then you've got another thing comin'–

PM-A: Sally, ... I think when I put that thing in the sky, I thought I would have a good laugh watching the world scramble under it. And… a lot of the Petras have, but I... the me that's worked with you for the past few years has seen that… I think you've turned into better people, and I think the ODAR I came from was afraid of that. Afraid to meddle with anything too early in case the people who grew a conscience would stay instead of leave.

SG-A: And you think you're one of those people who grew a conscience.

PM: Let's just say I'm taking a page out of the Barlowes' book: I'm defying my stars.

SG-A: There's that name again, who the hell is Barlowe?

PM-A: An almost double agent who… it's a lot to explain. Point is: he rejected what his timeline had in store for him, everything he knew he was supposed to do, just for a shot at happiness. That's all I'm trying to do. I'm the version of me that finally learned to leave well enough alone. If… if you think the rest of the team would have me.

SG-A: Yeah… That's a really nice offer I guess? I mean, after two and a half years of lying straight to our faces. But I think we're still gonna pass.

PM-A: At least let me tell you what we're doing? So you guys can, y'know. Do something about it?

SG-A: Fine. But then you're gone.

PM-A: I… I understand.

[[SFX: radio tuning; a Petra frantically packs a bag, police scanner tuning in the background.]]

ANOTHER PETRA MARQUEZ (PM-B): Hey, it's Campy Campanella. Looking for a callback. Anybody. Zimmer, Erskine, jeez, if one of you went rogue and took Robinson, I'll take it! I haven't heard from anybody in a dog's age, and I'm calling that most of you have been tagged out by the Yankees. If I don't hear back from any of you soon, I'm just gonna assume you're gone, I don't-

[[SFX: The scanner hits a clear signal.]]

CHET WHICKMAN (CW): *[on police scanner]* Closing in. Breach in five.

PM-B: That's not good. Where's an exit, where's an exit…

[[SFX: The wooden door shatters into splinters as the ODAR cavalry appears]]

PM-B: Shit!

AGENT: Stop! You're surrounded!

PM-B: Fuck me… Never thought I'd have to actually use this move...

[[SFX: Petra grabs her bag and makes a break for it]]

AGENT: She's going for the window! Open fire!

[[SFX: The agents open fire at Petra; one grazes her, but as they chase her down she makes it to the window and through; she falls hard, two stories, into a bush; Petra grunts in pain]]

CW: *[distant, approaching]* Over here, in these bushes!

[[SFX: Chet wrestles Petra to her feet, subdues her and puts her in handcuffs]]

PM-B: Get your hands off of me!

CW: Aren't you excited? You get to go see your sisters.

PM: You monsters!

[[SFX: radio tuning; Esther hangs up the phone.]]

ESTHER ROBERTS (ER): That was the extraction crew in Alabama. Another Petra in custody.

JACK WYATT (JW): What does that make?

SG-A: Seven.

SALLY GRISSOM PRIME (SG-P): Plus the three unaffiliated Petras, that brings us almost up to the twelve that we've identified.

ER: Except one.

SG-A: The Big, Bad, Petra Prime.

JW: Do we have any leads?

ER: *[resigned sigh]* I have a hunch.

SG-A: Go on.

ER: When Amelia called, she also informed me that the team retaking the Eldridge had stopped checking in.

JW: ...I mean, it's an out-of-commission frigate sitting in drydock. It's not like–

SG-A: You've gotta be kidding me.

ER: Well, it fits her character, at least.

SG-P: What a place for a supervillain lair.

JW: Are we sure it's her?

SG-P: That's definitely it. She's one to appreciate a big symbol.

JW: What do we do?

SG-P: Roberts, can you get me the plans for that boat?

ER: I'm on it.

[[SFX: Esther picks up the phone again and begins dialing; radio tuning; the ODAR lab breakroom]]

ER: I got the developed photos from the NACA flyover.

SG-P: And?

[[SFX: Esther puts the photos upon the table]]

ER: This is the deck of the Eldridge on the 5th... this is the dock on the 6th. See that right there? That box?

JW: Huh.

ER: Gone on the 5th, there on the 6th. I know for a FACT that nobody should be anywhere near that boat. It's got to be her.

JW: Are you sure?

SG-P: Definitely. It's her.

ER: She must be all alone. All her friends got locked up.

JW: All her other herselves, you mean.

SG-A: So we did it?

SG-P: We did it! Beer, anyone?

JW: None for me, thanks.

SG-P: Really? Hmmph.

JW: I'll take a Coke if we have 'em.

SG-P: "Pepsi OK?"

ER: ...Do we usually stock Pepsi?

SG-P: Never mind. Bad joke.

[[SFX: Sally-Prime goes to the fridge and gets 3 beers & 1 soda; Esther lays out blueprints]]

ER: Alright everyone, excuse me, figured we could go over the blueprints one more time.

JW: Booooo. How about we just foil the supervillain plot to blow time to pieces in the morning?

ER: Is that any way to speak to your superior?

JW: Well...Off the clock, it's how I speak to a friend.

ER: Fine. Promise me a game of Dilemma and you won't see them the rest of the night.

JW: Deal.

[[SFX: Esther puts her blueprints away; Sally-Prime returns with the drinks]]

SG-P: Money's on Roberts!

SG-A: My money on Wyatt's as good as yours.

JW: I find your lack of faith disturbing.

SG-P: Alright, alright, guys. Here, Roberts, Wyatt. Everyone…

[[SFX: Dramatic pause as everyone lifts their drinks in the air.]]

SG-P: My life has been a goddamn roller-coaster since meeting you all both in my time and yours. This team… no matter the rewrite, this team has meant so much to me. All of our work, all of the paradoxical bullshit we've gone through… thank you. It's been an honor to work with all of you, again, so this is to you and to all the people who may not be dead but certainly aren't with us.

SG-A: Cheers./**JW:** Amen./**ER:** To all of them.

[[SFX: They raise their drinks.]]

SG-P: I know we've been working on this as a team but… I'm going to the Eldridge, alone.

OTHERS: *[sounds of protest]*

SG-P: -And before you say anything, this isn't some heroic self-sacrifice bullshit. Okay, maybe it kind of is BUT I'm the one who has enough experience with the WELT to wing it on the fly if I have to and who knows Petra and might be able to… talk to her. So, this is… a final goodbye. Possibly.

JW: Given the 10 tons of unresolved emotions between you two, I'm sure it'll go great.

SG-P: Yeah, maybe even especially because of that. But really… I've already given up my future. Twice, at least. I want all the people I care about to see theirs, not just you guys but everyone you haven't met yet, Nikhil, Lou, Bridget–well you've already met her, huh, Roberts?

ER: Wait, what?

SG-P: Nevermind, anyway... I've got nothing to lose and you all have everything to gain. Let me do this. Sally, let me leave the DeLorean on the train tracks.

SG-A: ...I really hope it's a little less violent than getting hit by a train.

SG-P: You and me both, pal.

JW: And one day you can tell us what any of that meant.

ER: Here here.

[[SFX: They clink their bottles; tape recorder stops]]

[Ad music]

M: Do you miss having a full head of hair? Do you ever wish you could turn back the clock on hair loss? Well, with my new startup, Foll-Back, you can go back in time ten years, and literally take the hair from your younger self!

[off-mic] Wait what? The paradoxes melted our test subject into a giant hair beast? Can't do that. Hmm, what about…

I present to you ForHims.com - A one-stop shop for hair loss, skincare, and sexual wellness, for men.

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[[SFX: tape recorder starts; waves in a harbor, seagulls pass by]]

SG-P: Damnit, Roberts, the dry-dock was supposed to be dry! *[pause]* Looks like the only entrance is by the very obvious bridge or the chains connecting

the boat to the dock and I... I am not as young as I used to be. So, bridge it is.

[[SFX: Sally creeps up onto the bridge, gripping the railing as she walks]]

SG-P: Weird, figured this place would be crawling with Petras.

[[SFX: She steps off onto the deck and runs over to hide behind a box of equipment.]]

SG-P: And there it is, the transmitter. Right there. In the wide open. No one around. Obviously a trap. Think, Grissom, think. Why couldn't I have thought to… No, that might kill me back in 1943 and… damn. Okay, no EMP. Just gonna… walk right out there and make it up as I go. And go.

[[SFX: She briskly walks out onto the deck; she's immediately spotted by Petra, interrupted]]

PETRA MARQUEZ PRIME (PM-P): Stars are pretty out here, huh?

SG-P: Hey, at least I knew this was a trap.

PM-P: And yet you came anyway.

SG-P: *[mocking]* And yet you let me on board anyway.

PM-P: Pff. Whatever.

SG-P: Where are all of your Minion Petras?

PM-P: Didn't need to be here.

SG-P: You were always more of the loner type.

PM-P: Two lonely peas in a lonely pod, then.

SG-P: Petra, isn't all… this a little… extra? Your secret lair on the deck of the ship all this started on.

PM-P: Can't a girl like the poetry of it? The original Sally brought to the original site of time travel.

SG-P: I'm not even close to the original Sally. What are we doing here, Petra? You wanna Bond villain monologue at me before you wipe some poor city or, or a state off the face of the earth with your goddamn orbital superweapon? You got to see the whole world scramble like ants under its orbit, terrified of what it is and now you wanna see me do the same, up close and personal? Fuck that, Petra. If you're gonna blow somewhere to kingdom come, get it over with and add your name right next to all the other sons of bitches who have done the same.

PM-P: That's so cute. I'll admit I grabbed some popcorn and kicked back after everyone discovered my gift in the sky. And sending me to work for ODAR by your side was inspired, honestly, I'm mildly disappointed I couldn't be there in person. But no, I've set my sights bigger. And I wanted you to know before… well, before we both won't be able to know. Huh. I guess this kind of is my Bond villain monologue. Did always think 007 was a prick.

SG-P: What's bigger than putting a damn time gun in the… wait.

[[SFX: A pause as Sally takes in the scene before her.]]

PM-P: I'll give you this Sally, it's entertaining as hell to watch your face as you put two and two together.

SG-P: You flip that switch in your hand, send a tachyon signal to the WELT in 1943–

PM-P: And it activates it the moment it appears, either destroying the anchor point and stopping YOUR original experiment OR at the very least, destroying the Eldridge, killing you, Donovan, Whickman and anybody else who let this shit build up in the first place. Government chalks up Project RAINBOW as a failure, we all forget about ODAR, no one's the wiser.

SG-P: ...You have no idea that's what'll happen, Petra. You're messing with the fabric of spacetime, this be the end of existence as we know it! All of it!

PM-P: You don't care if I cross the streams! You keep going on and on about messing with the laws of the universe but you messing with those laws back in 20[redacted] is what got us here in the first place. You are responsible for everything that has happened but especially, especially everything that hasn't happened. ODAR treats every past iteration like they don't matter, like they never mattered. And the great cosmic joke of it all is that they're right! They don't matter. When time is putty in your hands, it doesn't matter what shape you mold it into. So really, it doesn't matter if the WELT fires at this very deck on October 28th, 1943 because it'll be just another stupid iteration that time becomes and none of us will ever know!

SG-P: That's bullshit.

PM-P: Bullshitter's calling bullshit, that's a surprise.

SG-P: If you were so decided on that course of action, if you truly thought that past iterations didn't matter… we wouldn't be standing here right now. You would have pulled the trigger thirty-five proverbial minutes ago and ended this because if there's one thing I know about you, Petra, once you really decide on a course of action, it's as good as done. But I think you know as well as I do that everything that's happened and everything that hasn't happened still matters. When you arrived in 1943, you may have been alone but your brain, your unique, beautiful brain still carried the memory of your classmates, your sister…. Your family. And that… that matters, Petra! Carrying these stories across time, even if it kills most of us… that matters. If

you really don't want to continue their legacy, then fine. Flip that fucking switch and get it over with. But don't you dare tell me that none of this matters.

[[SFX: Silence save for the distant sound of waves. Then:]]

PM-P: *[gently]* I just… I wanted the choice. You and I are the ones who never got to choose.

[[SFX: Petra slides Sally the transmitter switch]]

PM-P: So here. This is me, making my choice but… if there's anyone in time that deserves the option to end all of this it's you. Take the switch.

SG-P: You know, it's not much smaller than that platinum test cylinder I picked up at the SSC. Feels like a lifetime ago. Guess it kind of is.

PM-P: Would that Sally have pressed it?

SG-P: She's not around to answer that question. She never got that choice.

PM-P:

[[SFX: radio tuning; Sally and Petra in a boat]]

SG-P: You better hope we don't fuck this up.

PM-P: Me? I'm still in the "86-ing you" camp.

SG-P: I better hope we don't fuck this up.

PM-P: That's the right answer. I'm recording this, by the way.

SG-P: I'd thought you would be sick of microphones right now.

PM-P: If this is the end, I want a little souvenir. To send to Nikhil and Mateo.

[[SFX: Sally spools up a Timepiece]]

SG-P: We're going to fix this, Petra.

PM-P: Classic hubris, Grissom.

[[SFX: The Timepiece reaches critical and activates; an echo of a voice drifts by; the deck of the Eldridge, October 28th, 1943. The latest Sally appears on the deck; her platinum cylinder rolls past; she's about to hurl and fall over, when Sally-Prime and Petra rush over to catch her.]]

NEWEST SALLY (SG-X): *[groans]*

SG-P: Easy, Sally.

PM-P: We got you, just hold on.

[[SFX: Sally-Prime & Petra drag the new Sally quickly over to the edge of the ship and jump off into the water; after a couple of seconds, they splash down.]]

CW: What was that? Hey Jennings, did you hear something?

SG-X: ...huh?

[[SFX: Sally-Prime, driving the boat, taps Petra and points to the awakening paradox.]]

SG-P: *[sotto]* Hey.

PM-P: Hey, Sally. I'm Petra. It's nice to finally meet you.

SG-X: who are you? Oh God, I feel… awful. What happened with the test?

PM-P: Oh man, where to even start with that one...

SG-X: is everything alright? there was an accident, I tried to fix the mass and then the ground was different and I was outside–am I in a boat?

PM-P: There were some complications.

[[SFX: Sally-X sits up, then inhales sharply through her teeth against a wave of pain]]

SG-X: Ah, why does everything hurt?

PM-P: You've had a long trip. And we had to give you some medicine. For your health.

SG-X: Why?

SG-P: Because of me.

SG-X: Why about you… do you look like me? I think this might be the drugs but you look almost exactly like me.

SG-P: I am you.

SG-X: What?

[[SFX: Sally-X tries to sit up, but is knocked off-balance by the rocking of the boat.]]

PM-P: Hold on there, big girl. You're still a little woozy. Wait till we reach the shore.

SG-X: What the fuck is going on?

SG-P: So it turns out, the Higgs Array is a perfect vehicle for traveling back in time.

SG-X: Uh…. Okay.

SG-P: In my version, the government nabs us from the deck of that Navy boat, and I basically got forced into being a Player in the Cold War.

PM-P: A lot of dumb stupid stuff and a bunch of war crimes.

SG-P: And Petra and I had a long think about it, and we basically decided that it's better off if they don't get their hands on the time machine in the first place. So we threw you overboard.

PM-P: Without anybody seeing!

SG-P: She's really proud.

PM-P: *[indignant]* It was very cool! I time-traveled this boat! Do you know how hard it is to send a boat that you're not currently standing on back in time??

SG-P: Anyway, we figured we'd, y'know, fade into the shadows and let history play out however it's going to. Without us messing around with it.

[Beat.]

SG-X: I guess I don't have a choice in this, do I?

SG-P: I don't know, do you? I didn't have a choice. Neither did Petra. You can be who you want to be.

SG-X: ...In 1943.

SG-P: It's not perfect. I'm sorry. If I could make this easy, you know I would.

PM-P: You're right, though, you didn't ask for this, and we're sorry.

SG-P: All of us get a raw deal. I wanted to change my timeline, but I didn't ask if I could change yours. And now you're stuck with that. But I will do everything in my power to help.

SG-X: I'm not going back home, am I?

PM-P: Not unless you know something we don't. But it's not so bad. *[to SG-P]* Over here.

SG-P: Ok.

[[SFX: Sally pilots the boat toward a coastline.]]

SG-X: This is so much…

SG-P: This is new for us, too. We're changing everything. We want to do something new.

SG-X: What's that?

PM-P: We don't know yet.

[[SFX: Boat crunches up onto the gravel coast.]]

SG-P: Probably get a car, drive down the coast, and disappear.

SG-X: Can you just... do that?

SG-P: More or less. It's a lot easier to disappear in the 40s. And Petra is really good at it.

PM: It sure as hell beats working for the mad science wing of the military industrial complex.

SG-P: You in?

SG-X: I don't know… I…

PM: Come onnnn, This is the get out of jail card you didn't know you had.

[[SFX: Petra disembarks]]

SG-P: You're part of something new. Something that hasn't been tried before. Stay with us. I'm the only person you trust, anyway. *[pause]* You coming?

SG-X: ...I don't suppose I've got anything better to do. Do I?

SG-P: Nope. Here, let me help you.

SG-X: *[coolly]* I got it.

SG-P: *[caringly]* Sally, it's okay. I've got you.

[[SFX: With assistance from Sally-Prime, Sally-X slowly makes her way onto the shore.]]

PM-P: Oh, one more thing.

[[SFX: Petra coses the Timepiece with a snap, sets it into the gravel, picks up a crow bar, and smashes it once... and then two more times for good measure. Then she kicks the hunk of junk into the water.]]

SG-P: Satisfied?

PM-P: Gettin' there.

SG-P: Come on, let's go.

[[SFX: Petra and the Sallies walk off into the forest, leaving only the birds and the lapping of the water against the boat; radio tuning; Mateo & Nikhil's Outpost]]

NS: So what kind of messages are we going to send from here?

MM: Well, we just happen to have this drive of recordings from all different timelines…

NS: So we're doing it? We're just putting it out there, for the world?

MM: I mean, ODAR, KTNK...their real weapon was secrecy. Not time travel. Put these in the hands of anyone who listens, and well. All the 77s in the world couldn't undo that!

NS: I'm picturing them frantically chasing everyone down.

MM: Flashing them Men-in-Black style, heh.

NS: But..all of them? I mean, there are recordings of you and me in there…

MM: Aaaww, are you embarrassed?

NS: No, I just...I like what we have. Adding an audience to it is...strange.

MM: Well, I was thinking, we could really piece together the most important stuff, make a compelling, cohesive string out of all this mind-bending paradoxy business. More people could get through it if they didn't have to listen to—oh, what does it say here—all *30,000* hours of recordings across all the timelines we have?

NS: Do you have any idea what it's like watching your face light up? Do you even realize the whole world changes every time an idea pops into your head?

MM: Stop, I'm supposed to be the mushy one.

NS: What we're going to release to the world...it's dangerous. Nothing will be the same once we do.

MM: Ha! Yeah, well, we'll cross that bridge when we get to it I guess!

NS: You just laugh it off like that. It's incredible.

MM: Dr. Sharma, I need your professional opinion on a most urgent matter.

NS: What is it?

MM: This broadcast needs a beginning.

NS: Ha, well, in my expert opinion, there's no better place than...here.

MM: Of course! That's perfect. Just listen.

[[SFX. He hits Play and the recording begins.]]

SG: *[on recording]* Hello? Testing, one two… Okay! This is the audio diary of…

[[SFX: recording fades out; tape recorder runs on blank tape; tape recorder stops]]

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ars PARADOXICA was created by Daniel Manning & Mischa Stanton. Season 3 was also written by Eli Barraza, Julian Mundy, Danielle Shemaiah & Tau Zaman.
Episode 36: Release features -

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with special thanks to Isabel Atkinson

Production help from Brandon Grugle. Special production on Season 3 by Daniel Manning. Original music by Mischa Stanton and by Eno Freedman-Brodmann.

ars PARADOXICA is brought to you by The Internet: It's 3am, go to bed!

10 12 02 13 01 08 13 17 09+2 29 08+3 15+1 03+2 21 04 06 27 12+2 20 02+2 02+3 14 13 14 16 30 13+1 03 13+3 01+5 22 03 03 22 40
WEATHER IN TULSA: ¯_(ツ)_/¯

End